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ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Midnight
of the Ranges

by George Gilbert

Author of "The Flame Orchid," etc.

Missing Page: Inside Front Cover

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and postmarked before
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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

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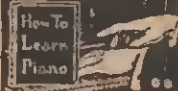
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Midnight of the Ranges by George Gilbert

Author of "The Flame Orchid," "They Were Seven," etc.

CHAPTER I.

HE PACKS TWO GUNS.

FRIENDLY blue-gray eyes a-twinkle in their nets of sun-born wrinkles; light brown hair flaring out whimsically from under the clasp of his pushed-up broad-brim, Ed Burlane lolled in the saddle atop Midnight and listened in comfort to the row. For the stocky, gnarled, sprandle-legged big man with the butt of his six-gun snugged into the grip of his right hand, weapon half drawn, had the "age" on the man he was discussing so successfully and cussing so gracefully; and half of the population of Coppered Jack knew it and was watching from the outside of the town's straggling buildings, and the other half knew it and was watching from inside, out of the line of possible fire.

"You ornery, dog-faced, no-'count, long-legged, swallow-tailed man-skinner," the man with the "age" fleered, his voice heavy, ominous. "I got to my gun first. I've got ye cold, Bart Barnquist! Ye own or graze them big herds o' yourn over half o' San Felicé County, but there's my lil shack an' home spot, an' it stays with me. I'm a son of a Native Son, so there's no way yo' c'n ho'nswaggle me out o' my

home; Texas law won't 'low it, doggone you' hide."

"You ca'm down, Peters," the threatened man pleaded, his face red, sweat on his forehead, from which his sombrero was pushed back. His hands were up; his gun swung futilely as his body swayed with tremors of fear. "I ain't projectin' to git your mite o' a ranch—I'm only talkin' lease—"

"Then why n't ye quit shoving an' pushing ag'in' my bound'ries with those irrigation ditches o' yourn? Ye got all th' water you c'n use, but you're bound to have my two springs runnin' into your pipes? An' you quit rollin' fakers ag'in' me with those papers to sign, which if I sign, losés me my water holdin's for a few measly dollars to you. Get me?"

The hand holding the gun barely tensed, yet the gun, like a living thing, had leaped forth, and its muzzle was against the lower, left-side ribs of the threatened man, the barrel inclined gently upward, in line with the heart.

"I'll quit," the cornered Barnquist slobbered; "I'll let you alone—"

"You better! I been badgered an' pestered eenuff! Twin Springs suits me an' it suits Ber'nice, my gal. We stick till we move ourselves, Barnquist. Tell that to all

your runners-up an' no-'count hirelings an' man-killin' deputies that you c'n control. If there's any more scrougin' onto me, or loco-weed balls dropped into my corral or strychnin put into th' waterin' troughs, you'll jus' die—sudden. I won't spend no time a shooting it out with those hired men o' yourn; I'll come to you an' I'll come a shooting and I'll get you, cold turkey, if so be I c'n. Ever' slug my gun throws is nicked on th' nose, so they'll spread, too, and one o' them slugs sure would sprandle out wide in your yellow fat."

He ceased. The street was quiet. Men here and there, frozen in their interest, combined with fear of the gunman whose facile draw had proved his lethal skill in handling his chosen weapon, shifted their weight, sighed, or spat. Peters swept a single glance off Barnquist, but it took in everything up and down the way, before, behind, on both sides. Then he turned sidewise, whisked about a building, and was gone, with a speedy and pantherlike energy that defied pursuit. Before they had awakened, the spellbound folk, to the fact, he had mounted, for the rataplan of horse's hoofs from behind the Thimble Belt saloon told of Peters's home-going up the alley behind the town's few business places.

Ed Burlane, who had followed the actions of the big man with such amused interest, smiled as he heard the thrumming of the hoofs that told of Peters's disappearance. He swept his glance about and noted how, the danger gone, men came swarming out, buzzing, gesticulating. Three or four fellows, plainly hangers-on, came to Barnquist's side and began to counsel with him as to what measures should be taken.

Barnquist, tugging savagely at the left horn of his black mustache, caressed the butt of his gun with his right hand.

"We c'n git a posse together an' skull-drag him out'n his hole, an' mebbe he'll try to shoot it out an' then—"

So began one of the hangers-on, a man with a dry, hard voice, very light hair and evebrows so thin and lacking in color they seemed not to exist in certain plays of light and shade. His eyes were like agates, cold, unfeeling, keen.

"You're whirlin' a bigger loop than you

c'n throw," Barnquist cut him off with, "bellerin' right out with all 'hell listenin' to you shoot your wad, Maltrane."

"I'm generally able t' throw any loop I whirl," the other crisped, falling back, "but I didn't see you makin' any fancy moves while ol' Peters had you stuck up."

"No; I don't work by main strength," Barnquist answered, quieter now and in full control of himself. Why didn't you do something, Maltrane?"

"Man, I was taking forty winks in th' Thimble Belt, an' only woke up when it was all over. I was leanin' against th' back wall with my chair tilted back. You ask Barnum, th' barkeep."

"He sure was a snoozin'," another man confirmed. He was a little, wiry, spluttery fellow, with a much-chewed pipe-stem in constant action between nervously active teeth. "He was lost in dreams, far away."

By now a score of men had swarmed about Barnquist. He waved them aside and started to plow through the crowd toward the Thimble Belt. But Midnight, towering up, was in the way. Burlane was looking down amusedly, his smile proving his enjoyment of the scene. He had ridden in quietly to come squarely against the little street drama unrolling and had stopped his horse to watch the row, of a kind not uncommon in old times in the long-horn country.

The good horse did not move. Midnight only heeded one voice—Ed's. Burlane had reared the big stallion from colthood when he had worked for the X. M. T. outfit near Vernon, Texas, and had found the colt almost starved, its mother dead. Ed had bottle-fed the little fellow at first, then made him his own special pet, had broken him, put the first saddle on him, and so the bond between them was strong, enduring. Unless Ed spoke or twitched rein, Midnight would not move from where he had been halted.

Barnquist broke eruptively through the human ring, head down, bull-like, intent.

"C'me on into th' Belt, you two," he called to Maltrane and the sputtery, wiry man—"Maltrane an' Weaver, c'me on."

He half turned, continued his headlong onset. The people had parted from before

him like chips before a wave. He butted his head into the solid haunch of Midnight. The horse did not move, except to toss his head.

Barnquist drew back and for the first time saw the obstacle against which he had hurtled so blindly. Saw also the easy, good-natured smile of Ed Burlane, as he lolled in his saddle, viewing the whole scene with the air of a philosopher.

"Git that hoss outa th' way," Barnquist snarled.

"You seem to resemble youse'f," Ed dropped down pleasantly from his serene height.

Barnquist's face became purple. Maltrane and Weaver, backing him up, thrust forward belligerently. Weaver, spluttering, champed on his pipe stem; Maltrane's agate eyes clashed in glances with Ed's own that by now were steady to keen regard of the trio.

Barnquist smacked his lips in a peculiar manner. The nimble hands of Maltrane and Weaver slid weaponward.

"*I'd not do that, if I were you, hom-bres!*"

Burlane hardly seemed to stir, yet move melting into move, his hands had flashed, one to each hip and, with sure-fire accuracy of the born two-gun man, his 45's flicked into line. The two hireling killers froze. Barnquist stilled.

A pressure of Burlane's knee, a whispered word, and Midnight quietly stepped offside, but so steadily that Ed's weapons did not deviate by a hair's breadth from their aim.

"Now, go where you was a-goin' an' be quick," he ordered. "*I'amose, poco pronto!* I'm not aimin' for trouble hereabouts, but I'm not dodgin' any that comes my way. I'm just ridin' for a job, after quittin' X. M. T., an' if you'll inquire back to Vernon, *they'll tell you who I am.*"

The baffled trio stalked by the big black horse, whose ears were cocked at them and whose aristocratic nose sniffed at them in passing. The twin guns kept in line until the two had passed behind the swinging doors of the saloon. Then, at a touch of Ed's heel, the giant equine wheeled, as if on a pivot, and was lost under a dust cloud before the spectators could get their wits.

As the horse galloped off, the saloon door slammed back, and Weaver, gun in hand, appeared. He swung the weapon up, his left hand crossed over right, the wrist of the right hand firm against the wrist of the left that was atop—in the attitude for a long-range shot. He was steady for the pull when a bluff, tall young man yelled from the crowd:

"Put it up, now; put it up!"

The speaker broke from the crowd and came to Weaver's side in a few strides. He was ruddy of face, well built, eager, alert. His eyes were deeply set; his hair black, intensely so. A neat suit of wide-wale corduroy, a fine pair of high-heeled riding boots, a silver-trimmed stetson completed a costume that became him well. His neck was encircled with a white and black checked handkerchief, carelessly knotted under the collar of his gray flannel shirt. Plainly he was of the blood of Barnquist—the inheritance of shifty, glittering black eyes told that, as well as the bulk of torso and limbs.

Maltrane had thrown the gun's muzzle out of line at the other's first word, striking over Weaver's shoulder from inside the saloon to do it. Weaver grinned knowingly at the young man who had given the command.

"All right, Barney," he agreed, holstering the weapon.

"What d' y' mean, lettin' him get off like that?" and Barnquist came through the swinging doors of the saloon quickly.

"Barney here said—"

"Who's bossin' Ox Bow ranch, me or Barney?" Barnquist demanded.

"I reckon you are," Maltrane said coldly.

"Then—"

"You let Mal be, old man," the young man said; "I saw it all, an' I've got an idea—"

"Let's get under cover then; no use shootin' our wad before all the town, pup," the father growled.

Barney took Maltrane's arm and nudged him into the saloon. His father followed. A dozen men edged in, on one excuse or another, to find the father, son and two retainers gone into a rear room, where their voices, rumbling, could be heard. Parley

Brown, lean, morose, evaded queries with the saloon keeper's usual skill, and gradually it sifted into the united consciousness of the populace of Coppered Jack that the town's boss wanted no enlightenment or assistance, and the men dribbled out by ones, twos or threes, leaving the barroom vacant save for Barnum, wiping up the last drops of spilled liquor, and Brown, one ear cocked toward the tightly closed back room where the four still talked in heavy undertones that defied all attempts at eavesdropping.

The saloon keeper ordered:

"You, Barnum, I'm going in there, as Barnquist ordered. You watch an' discourage any attempts to listen in against the partition."

The bartender cocked one sly eye at the Thimble Belt's owner, nodded casually, and continued his wiping-up process. That completed, he stood at ease against the back of the rough bar, his lantern-jawed face avid with a curiosity as to what was going on behind the partition, but his dull, sunken eyes denoting the caution of his ilk—a caution that kept him away from the dangerous sport of eavesdropping on the quartet behind the screening boards, where the buzz of half-muted tongues told of plans being made, plans of evil omen.

Coppered Jack! The very name the proof of some hectic moment in border annals! Vernon was far off to the east, south-east; to northwest was Twin Springs, and the main trail that forked to there went on and on, whiffed to powdery dust by hoofs of plodding teams from Little Soda. To the south was but the open range, rolling, vacant, for many an hour's lope toward Mexico and, almost directly southeast of Coppered Jack, were the huge Barnquist holdings, some legal, some illegal, more pre-empted by right of the six-gun's eminent domain. And a little below the Barnquist place, typical of its sort, was the Chaparral Cock, a mere wayside *aguardiente* joint. So, the geography of the region fixed, the saloon keeper, Parley Brown, going to the dividing door, claims attention.

Brown tapped at the rough-boarded door to the rear room. The buzzing of voices ceased and he was given:

"Come in, Brown, if tha's who 't is."

He dodged in and shut the door carefully. The four—Barnquist, his son, Maltrane and Weaver—were grouped about a table, seated on up-ended boxes.

"Room clear?" Barnquist demanded, his heavy-jowled face less red, now that his anger was in leash.

"Yes, sir."

"Sit down," and Barnquist wagged a crooked forefinger toward a vacant box seat.

Brown obeyed. The four drew their heads in toward the table's center; Brown's joined them. They began to confer again, Barnquist leading.

"Parley Brown, we've got to meet this defi o' Peters."

"Yes, boss; two blazers run on you in one day calls for a showdown."

"Oh, that range rider from over Vernon way has gone. Folks will forget him if we don't stir him up." Barney Barnquist cut in with.

"He sure had a ready pair of weapons," Weaver spluttered, champing his pipestem loudly.

"You'd 'a' had him, if Barney hadn't stopped you," Maltrane offered.

"Yes, Lars, an' we'd had the hull X. M. T. outfit over to see what happened to him," Barney countered with. "I'm only a little better 'n of age, but I got some sense a'ready, if dad does call me pup," with a side glance of sinister import at his father, who was too intent upon present business to note it.

"How is a question," his father said shortly, "but what's done is done. First question is, how to run old Peters out of the country. He's got those twin springs on his place, a clear title—"

"An' a quick draw," Weaver snuffled between bites at his pipe.

"No use rubbing it in thataway, Weav," Maltrane flicked, his white eyebrows drawn in a sinister scowl. His agate eyes were hard, glinting.

"No; let's not spend any time mouthin' over what's past," the elder Barnquist blurted, yet under his breath; "one thing at a time. How'm we goin' to get Peters? I c'n work it for a warrant, an we c'n get some of our men deputized—Maltrane and Weaver here and others—and if he shoots

it out, he loses. He can't buck the hull law forces of San Felicé County."

"Old man, let me have a throw at this?" Barney offered suddenly.

"You got a plan, you pup? Near time," with keen derision.

"Yes. Peters will be in town soon. You meet him, peaceable. I'll be with you. We'll git him into the barroom for a friendly drink, and once inside—Brown here maneuvering to have the room empty, except for us—we c'n frame something on him that will stick, with only we folks as witnesses."

The elder Barnquist's hand shot out across the rough boards.

"You got a head on you, pup," he let out admiringly. "I allus told the boys you'd be wo'th raisin' after you got your gait."

"Sure sounds good," Maltrane agreed.

"Good boy, Barney," Weaver champed on his pipestem.

Brown nodded silent assent.

"And here's what we frame," Barney went on, as the heads drew in closer and closer. "Ever'one knows old Peters shoots a .38 and that he nicks the nose of ever' bullet, so 't will mushroom or spread out and make a bigger wound. Tha's why he's got that name o' Nicked-Nose Peters."

"Yes?" his father breathed, his fat tongue licking his full lips. "Sounds good, pup. You show a few brains, like this, an' you'll be a man yet."

"Well, we get him in here. Maltrane and Weaver's in the back room here. When Peters's back is to the door o' this room and he's drinkin' with us, you two shoot. Maltrane, you shoot at Peters. With your .45, Weaver, you shoot all around the room, using a .38 and nicked-nose bullets. Weaver, you shoot first, and at the shot Peters will wheel, trying to draw. Pop and I will jump aside. As Peters turns, Maltrane, you get him. You never miss. Then pop can shoot a couple o' times, at Peters or wild. Weaver grabs Peter's cold gun, shoves his own, that's like it—they both ordered by mail th' same day, three years ago, remember?"

"I get you, boy," the father whispered tensely; "the crowd comes in, finds Peters dead, me with my gun hot and smokin' and

Peters' gun seemingly good and hot; him plugged, me O. K. The ceiling an' walls are full of nicked-nose bullets. Every one will know what has made them mushroom out so. Weaver c'n manage to shoot once into that pile o' wet bar-clothes Barnum keeps behind th' bar, eh? That will save one nick-nosed bullet unsmashed—a sure proof that Peters was using his gun."

"You got it, pop," the younger Barnquist whispered excitedly, "an' in th' excitement it will pass off that no one will think of Maltrane's gun, seein's Peters will be plugged, seemingly, by youn. It will look like—"

"Jus' as if Peters came in, after you'd made up," Maltrane sibilated; "got ornery over his lickin', drew, an' Bart beat him out on th' draw an' he shot wild after he was plugged. We c'n all stick to that story. No trial will be necessary."

"No; a coroner's jury—one that we'd pick—would bring in a verdict that Peters committed suicide," laughed Weaver, ending in a fit of sputtered chanipings that testified to his satisfaction with the plot.

"But won't folks notice Peters havin' my gun?" Weaver suddenly spoke up.

"Not in th' bustle," Barney Barnquist judged; "in a minute or two, when a good chance comes, I c'n sneak Peters's gun off somewhere, shoot it out, so it'll be powder-blackened in barrel and cylinder, substitute it an' give you back yours, Weaver. Who c'n object? Mal, here, as resident dep'ty o' this end o' San Felicé, will have charge o' th' corpse and effects until th' sheriff comes in, an' Sheriff Harvison will do 'bout's pop says, eh?"

"He will," the father snapped; "because he knows who swings th' big bunch o' votes down in this corner that decides th' county's plurality on sheriff. It's th' Barnquist crowd, eh, boys?"

"Easy 'nuff," champed Weaver.

Maltrane grinned nastily, his cold, hard eyes glittering.

"I c'n see his back before me now," he breathed, "an' I wish 't was right now we were to put th' slug into him."

"If anything goes wrong, I'll back up your play with my gun—th' new .45 that dad give me a while ago—"

"Mighty little need for you, after Maltrane draws one bead on him, at close quarters and with the age in his favor," Barney Barnquist interjected. "Mal never misses. Peters is 'bout th' onliest man hereabouts c'n beat him on th' draw. But he can't shoot any straighter 'n Mal c'n, though."

"Gimme the age an' I'll lay him out cold," Maltrane said.

"And now we all want our parts planned out, so there'll be no slips," Brown suggested; "let's go over it all, so there can be no mistake on just what each is to do."

"Before we do that, though," Weaver cut in, "We gotta think o' this thing. If we git rid o' Peters, th' little place 'll be his girl's."

"Leave that to me," Barney said suddenly; "I can take care of that part of it."

"Ho, ho!" his father laughed; "have you been trying to brand that maverick? I'll git a lease o' th' water at Twin Springs f'om her, hell-bent quick."

"Yes, an' I'm sure I c'n throw my loop over her, once her ornery dad is out o' th' way."

"Does he object to your seeing her?" the father asked.

"Yes; ordered me off the place a week ago"—bitterly. "I overplayed my hand, I guess; got a bit rough with the girl."

"Ha, ha! chip o' th' old block?" his father laughed, slapping the son on the back. They got up and went out together, only Brown remaining. On the way out Barnum reported that no customers had entered the saloon during their conclave.

CHAPTER II.

AT TWIN SPRINGS.

WHEN Ed Burlane, swaying easily in his saddle, despite the speed of Midnight, topped the edge of the little cup in which Coppered Jack lay, he saw, off up-trail, the cloud of dust that told of Peters going fast. Burlane was too sensible to give Midnight his head and let the huge black horse run down Peters's dappled dun cayuse. For to have ridden up suddenly from behind, in a cloud of

trail-murk, would have invited and warranted a shot, under the circumstances, as Peters, fleeing from Coppered Jack, would have substantial reason for supposing that the stranger was after him for a deadly purpose.

Ed contented himself with keeping Midnight in sight of the sign Peters's going cast into the air far ahead. The trail was dry—bone dry. So the dust-pillar of the fugitive was a safe guide.

"Looks to me, Midnight," Ed confided to the horse's off ear, "as if that old nester ahead o' us two had a job on his hands. An' he's got a gal with a pretty name. What's th' use riding after a job when there's plenty fun right under our noses, eh, old son-of-a-gun?"

Midnight twitched that off ear into which the confidence had been poured. He pranced and made a little *pasear* off-trail, then back, then made up the ground he had lost in a few strides. Ed didn't even notice this, so accustomed was he to the horse's playful ways.

After a time Burlane saw Peters turn down a side trail, toward a group of butts to the right. On the way they passed the laborers—Mexicans—at work on the Barnquist irrigation ditches. Burlane studied it out and saw how the water from the Peters place could be turned into the ditch easily. It only needed some straight digging across the open plain to bring it about.

Ed let Midnight walk until he could see, in the shadow of the buttes, the sod-house, the little corral, the sod-barn, the hen-house of the old nester. The windmill creaked cheerily as the evening wind drove it, and the trickle of water it was raising into the troughs where the cattle were watered was pleasant to at least one pair of ears, and Midnight twitched his forward at its tinkle, tinkle, tinkle.

"You go mighty slow, you old son-of-a-gun," Ed cautioned. "We aren't a going bang up against this old gunman's house without a hail to let him know we're friendlylike. If we do, he's more 'n likely to drill us first and investigate afterward, and serve us right if he did."

At a word the black horse stepped slowly; then, at another, stilled like a

statue. By now they were almost abreast of the house that was fast closed as to doors and windows. A little wreath of smoke over the chimney-top told Ed of supper to come, as did the spicy smell of frying bacon that had remained on the air after the last person in had slammed the portal fast shut.

Peters's tired horse, from the corral bars, whickered. Midnight started a reply, but the weight of Ed's hand on his mane stopped it dead.

Burlane raised his hand to his lips, cupped it and called:

"Hello, the house!"

There was no reply. Burlane's glance wandered along the low front of the sod-house, caught the glint of a muzzle that he was sure had been covering him from the first. He smiled a bit, called again:

"Hello, the house! Will your dog bite?"

"You jus' sit tight whar you be, young timer, till I come out," he heard Peters call through the window's crack where the glint of muzzle was. "A gun's on you. I want to see what so't of a harpen you are, anyways."

"I'll be good," Ed called, settling back more easily in the saddle, hands openly crossed on the pommel.

"Stay right like that; if you take those han's down, you'll get a slug," Peters boomed.

"I don't want to be slugged. I want to be fed," Ed laughed.

The door swung open. The old gunman leaped out, his .38 at a "ready." Ed grinned at him.

"Mighty handy with that tool of yourn, old-timer. I saw you fade that crowd in Coppered Jack.

"I did see ye on the aidge o' th' crowd, sitting on that big, black hoss," Peters said, lowering his gun. "Shucks, you ain't nothing to Barnquist?"

"No; I had to throw down on him, too, to get out of town. He tried to butt a hole in my hoss and ordered me out the way."

"He's a habit of ordering folks off'n th' hull green airth."

"I noticed that. He resembles himself a whole lot."

"Yes; tb' resemblance is good, too. Ho,

you Ber'nice. It's all right. Come on out," holstering his gun so smoothly the eye could hardly follow it.

Ed watched the door. In a moment it framed a vision.

Her face was good—open, filled with womanly charm. The lips were full, sweetly bowed, mobile. Her color was not high; the nose was a bit short, perhaps, and the warm-toned hair strayed over forehead and down the nape of her neck in wayward attractiveness. She was dressed in a faded print dress, and her shoes were stubbed out as to toes, yet withal she was a girl that any good man would want to know, to please, and make his confidante.

Burlane's broad-brim swept low over his saddle as he bowed in answer to her greeting, given at her father's word of explanation.

"You're sure welcome, stranger; light down, put your hoss in our home corral, an' come in an' he'll us eat supper."

"I sure will," Ed said, with no feigned heartiness. He swung down, stripped saddle and bridle from Midnight with a few deft motions. He clouted the horse with friendly zest into the corral, where Midnight joined the Peters horses eagerly. He hung up horse gear in the barn and then went indoors, to find Peters seated before the table in the large room that did duty as living-room and kitchen. Already the girl had a platter of crisped bacon on the table. The odor of coffee, well flavored, came to Ed, and the alluring aroma of pone and baked beans.

"Heap his plate, Ber'nice," her father urged; "we don't often get a stranger in to snack with us. Le's treat him well while we got him."

She stepped about briskly. Ed saw his plate mounded well, sampled the coffee and began to eat. Between bites he told Peters the details of his encounter with Barnquist, the old nester nodding at him sagely the while.

"You did right to throw down onto him, pronto," he approved; "w'en ol' Barnquist's on th' prod he's apt to do anythin' mean an' low-down."

"What's he so bent on havin' this little nook of yours for?"

"Why, he's got control of all the good water hereabouts. There's enough for Coppered Jack from wells there, but Barnquist owns the water rights that are good elsewhere, except these two springs of mine, that I've got tanked up. We're changing here from open range to closed. Barnquist sees that water, ditched in and owned outright, will be valuable. He's surrounding it. He's 'fraid, he's let drop so't I got it, that I'll have a supply and head him off on the monopoly he wants to get when the soda company begins to team its stuff out to the railroad from the Little Desert, where the company owns a small horax slough."

"He opines to make money selling water for the teams and teamsters, and mebbe to the railroad that folks say will come through one day," Berenice added, with the direct, easy manner of the plains girl.

"He seems to whirl a mighty big loop," Ed said, luxuriating in the final draft of coffee.

"He sure does, but he's made it too big when he's tried to cover Twin Springs," Peters insisted.

"Your title good?"

"Yes; one of those old Mexican War titles that reads 'as long as grass grows an' water runs.' The little place goes to my gal here when I'm through with it."

Ed glanced at her. Her eyes met his frankly, fully. He liked that, no attempt at coyness; no false modesty.

He rolled a cigarette. She was up in a moment and back with two burning, pliant splints, lighted at the hearth, one for Ed, one for her father's pipe.

"You don't suppose they'll try some underhand game on you?" Ed inquired, after the two men had puffed in silence for a few moments, as the girl quickly and deftly gathered up the dishes and made ready for her household task of after-supper cleansing. The two men had drawn back into one corner of the room to give her full play for her womanly activities.

"They can't try much more 'n they have a'ready," Peters puffed; "they've tried loco weed, poison, fire arrows shot into my stacks of wild hay—about ever'thing. Including men trying to buy me out on fake papers. I'm going to stick, by mighty.

What they've done is enough! This home suits me; I wouldn't know what to do anywhere else. Me an' Ber'nice has made a home here together since she was left a babby for me to 'tend, after her mother died. Her mother's buried out behind the biggest butte. There's a little clump o' willows there that she wanted to rest under. We've got a seat there, and Ber'nice tends the grave ever' few days."

"Then you are pretty much alone the most of the time?"

"Pretty much. Ber'nice, she sticks by me. Young Barnquist was projectin' around here for a spell back. But I got rid o' him—"

"I didn't see him. Is he like his dad?"

"Not on top, but down under more so, I guess. I'd rather see Ber'nice dead than tied to him."

"Uhuh," and Ed wagged his head. He rumbled up his hair with his strong fingers. A keen sense of hominess was upon him. He stretched out in his chair, rubbed his lean, long legs and sighed contentedly.

"You ridin' far, young timer?" Peters asked.

"Who? Me?" Ed stalled, wondering what he could say.

"Yes, 'cause if you wasn't in a hurry—"

"Oh, I'm not," as the girl came in, bringing the lamp needed to chase away the gathering shadows the dusk had been bringing forth from the room's corners. Berenice went softly out into the outer air, humming a bit of melody.

"You might visit a while. We'd sure be glad to have you stay. I've got two or three trillin' jobs that I've been saving till another man came 'long to he'p, so you needn't feel you're imposing on me."

Ed puffed contentedly. Out somewhere in the dusk he heard Midnight whicker. He strolled to the door. The girl was at the corral bars; the big stallion's head was over her shoulder. Burlane stared—Midnight, so offish, making up to the girl stranger!

"I'm giving him a lump o' sugar, Mr. Burlane," she called. "I hope you won't mind?"

"Give him—a pound," Ed called back cheerfully.

"What do you say 'bout stayin'?" Peters

reminded from within, as he thumped his chair about into a new position of ease.

"I'll stay 'long's you want me," Ed said. "I've got no plans or projects ahead; jus' riding for a job an' to see th' country here-away."

"All right," Peters said heartily. "We'll look things over in th' morning an' see what's needed. May have to ride in to Coppered Jack to get some wire an' staples. Probably hitch up th' buckboard to drag the stuff out on. That suit you?"

"Sure, old-timer."

The girl had finished feeding the stallion. As she left him he strained his neck out after her and whickered again.

"Oh, you old flatterer," she chided, turning and spitting his muzzle with the flat of her hand.

Midnight whickered again. The girl laughed and strolled toward the house, singing, as she came:

"Oh, the Chisholm Trail is a long, long road,
But when I ride it I don't pack no load,
For it leads to one that I love best,
And the trail's far end spells rest, pard, rest.

"How long you goin' to stay, Mr. Burlane?" she asked, as she neared the door.

"Till you folks take a club an' chase me over the hills to th' next range," he laughed. Her fresh, free laughter duetted with his own, and the deep booming of the old man's made it a trio. Midnight, from the corral bars, added his chest-deep whicker to the three, and then it was a quartet of good will and agreement.

CHAPTER III.

CHIPS FROM OLD BLOCKS.

AFTER the conference in the saloon, the Barnquists, father and son, went to the wagon-yard of Coppered Jack, the place where all sorts and conditions of men put out their horses. Weaver and Maltrane followed, retainerlike, at a respectful distance.

The two Barnquists, followed by the others, were soon mounted and riding toward their ranch, the Ox Bow, so called because their brand was shaped like an ox-

bow. The Barnquist ranch-house was one of the finest in the Southwest, rambling over an ample space, and enclosing a "gallery" in the center. It was white-painted, with many airy, large windows. The bunk-houses were ample and clean; and the best of bedding, food and everything to work with was furnished the Barnquist ranch-hands and hangers-on. Barnquist was known not to haggle over wages, if he could get done those things he wanted done and without question. Be it known, however, that often very fine range-riders, bronco-busters and wranglers refused to work for him. The Ox Bow clan were surly, offish, mean.

Barnquist was a widower. He had a crew of subservient Mexicans about the house who kept some sort of order, under the captaincy of a big, half-breed Papago who had been brought up on the place. She had been separated from her own tribe ever since Barney Barnquist's mother had died, and had looked after the boy, first as nurse, then as preceptor in all sorts of ranch-life escapades. This woman, Greasewood Kate, dressed as a white woman, but had the heavy face, sturdy body and quick actions of the Papago squaw. As Barney had grown in bulk and years he had escaped from her tutelage; but she had taken charge of the household and in some rough-and-ready way managed to govern the other servants. She was known to be honest and decent, and Bart Barnquist heeded her somewhat and trusted her.

A little way out of Coppered Jack father and son passed a group of Mexicans working on the irrigation ditch. They greeted their employer cordially, and Barnquist threw a handful of cigarettes to them, for which they scrambled.

The hulking ranch-owner laughed to see them scabble thus for his meanly bestowed bounty. He spurred his horse, a magnificent roan, powerful and well-boned, and Barney rode silently at his side for a while. Suddenly the elder man turned to the son.

"I suppose you sometimes wonder, pup, what I'm sinking all that money in that ditch for? Especially 's I don't give you much cash money?" he asked.

"Yes, but I knew 'twould do me no good

to ask," Barney answered sulkily, twitching meanly at the bridle of his rather poor-shaped pinto.

"You bet it wouldn't, pup, till I got good and ready to tell. Now listen. You showed headwork in planning that job on Nicked-Nose Peters to-day and in stopping Weaver from plugging him right in th' open an' f'om behind, like. You're raisin' a few brains under your wide brim. About time, too. Now, listen:

"I c'n see what others can't in th' range country. We big cattle-men have got to buy land, or peel down to smaller holdiu's and raise better steers, feed them on roughage we raise. The days of free range are going to end, pup. Not right away, hut before your time is full. I'm going to grab off what water my ditch will bring me down and be ready. It 'll pay for itself in water sold to the Little Soda Lake teams and teamers, if we c'n get shet o' Peters, who has those twin springs and c'n sell or give water away and keep me from chargin' what I like. You'll see th' day, pup, when them irrigation works of mine 'll be wo'th a heap."

"I admire your head-piece, pap," Barney said with a show of warmth. "And now't you've seen my head's on straight, let me in on some of your schemes and treat me less like a kid, will you?"

The father turned and looked at the son with an expression of contempt on his florid countenance.

"You got fine hosses, good clothes, good guns, for th' askin', pup. I give you a certain amount o' coin—"

"Yes, pap, but you treat me like a kid. I c'n ride better 'n most o' your range-riders; shoot like hell-fire—but no one knows it; I practised secret, like you said. Say, dad," with a sudden burst of confidence, "gimme a few hundred dollars, to spend jus' as I want, eh? I sure want to—"

The father glanced back. The two retainers were a safe distance behind.

"You quit whinin' like that, pup," Barnquist sneered; "when I'm gone, you'll handle the money and be hoss, but till then you take what things I pass out to you; hear, pup?" His tone became menacing, heavy.

The young man flashed a glance of resentment at the father, who laughed.

"I like to see you look like that, pup. You look jus' like a Barnquist: black-hrowed, scowling. No, pup; when you show you're a man, hard, able to handle it, you'll get plenty of money."

"I'll show you—some day, pap," the young man growled, his face drawing into a meaner scowl still. "I want money, real money, like other folks has, *cash* money, not credit at what ornery stores is in Coppered Jack, and har credit and tobacco money. I want *cash* money—"

"To spend on some of those Mexican gals in town, eh? Or to buy some geegaw to make it solid with that calico-skirted, half-shod filly out to Twin Springs, eh? Whyn't you *take* what you want in calico, eh, pup?"

He guffawed heavily, a flare of deeper passion marking his face that had become almost purple with the force of his argument.

"Pap," and the son's voice grated roughly over the soft thudding of the hoofs of the loping horses on the trail, "I'm goin' to have money—plenty of money, *cash* money. I'm goin' to handle it myself, pap, mind that!"

"You get it—ef you c'n, pup, but not off'n me—*yet*."

He cut his horse sharply with his quirt and drove the spurs into its flanks. The animal bucked, and he smashed it with the quirt's butt and gripped it with his huge knees, roaring with laughter as his spurs tore its haunches to ribbons. Barney watched this exhibition with sullen face. In a few moments the horse was reduced to a quivering, abject condition. Barnquist forced the animal back onto the trail again and jeered.

"There, son, is what 'll happen to you, if you buck-jump on me an' try to get hold of any *cash* money but what I give you. I'll ride you and spur you an' make you a sight for the hull range. But go as I want you to, and when I feel a good ready, you'll have plenty of *cash* money to spend."

He let up on the cruel bit and relaxed his knees. The horse groaned with relief. In a moment he had the animal loping again toward home.

Barney, a bit behind, ceased not to scowl at his father's back and refused several invitations to draw up beside him. Maltrane and Weaver, quite a distance behind, had not been direct witnesses of this little scene and had overheard nothing of the heated conversation between the two.

Leaving the main trail, the four went loping up to the Barnquist ranch. Father and son tossed the reins of their horses to Weaver and Maltrane and went toward the house. The son clung determinedly to the heels of the father and followed him into the doorway of a room on the corner of the house—a large "office," where Barnquist kept his few account-books and had a home-made desk and chairs. Barney slammed the door behind him as they entered.

His father wheeled on the young fellow when they were inside.

"Well, what 're you naggin' along back of me like that for, pup? Didn't I tell you what there was to it?"

"You had your say, pap," his face mottled with anger; "an' I've had mine. Now, gimme some cash money. I want—a lot."

"A lot, eh?" spreading out his legs and putting his big hands under the back of his coat. "You're not a-girlin' it, are you? You never showed no spunk like that before."

"Never you mind, pap. I want cash money, *now!*"

His jaw was set, his fists doubled.

Like lightning the father struck—once. The son, caught fair, crumpled. Barnquist stooped, flicked the gun from the son's holster, and threw it in the corner. Barney staggered up, his hand to his jaw.

"You found who runs this ranch, then, pup!" Barnquist growled. "Go pick up your fool gun—and git out!"

For a moment the son seemed about to renew the fight. Then a look of submission spread over his face and he took his hand from his jaw and came forward. He put out his hand and took that of his father, who tried to avoid the clasp.

"I say, pap," he whined; "don't hit me like that, pap. I'll quit askin' for cash money and go on credit, like I have."

He dropped the niggard hand of his father, stooped, got his gun, holstered it

smoothly, and went out. As he went, his father sneered.

"Huh, I thought you'd hit back—*once*, pup. I'm about sure you're not wo'th raising; such a pulin', no-'count, meek lam' as you are. Go in a corner an' chaw a bone!"

The door slammed. Barnquist sat down and laughed amusedly.

But outside the door the son, his face convulsed with hate, was standing, one clenched fist raised, the other hand gripped about his gun's butt. He wheeled and collided with a heavy form in the passageway that led from the outer entrance to the ranch-house's interior—the one leading from office to living-rooms. It was Greasewood Kate, Ox Bow's breed house manager.

Barney gasped, then relaxed.

"Why, Barnee, another fight weeth heem?"

"Yes, Kate. And sure as you're a half-Papago, I'll fight back, some day—"

Her broad, firm hand went over his mouth. She drew him down the little side corridor.

"Careful, Barnee! He is master of Ox Bow yet."

"But won't *all*-ways he, Kate. And when I'm master—"

"You will marry my girl, like you have promised?"

"Yes, Kate; but don't nag me on that, doggone it. Time enough to talk about that—later."

"Yes, time enough—if you talk right, Barnee! But you 'member a Papago squaw's girl is not a Mexican flirt, to be put off with a present."

"Draw in on your loop, Kate," squirming past her and bursting into the room at the end of the passage.

The half-breed woman was silent as she followed him. She seemed about to renew the conversation, when the door at the farther end of the room opened, and a girl of perhaps fifteen entered shyly. Her face brightened as she saw the half-breed. She was dressed in a simple white dress, with a pink ribbon in her black hair that was down her back in a thick, glossy braid. Her eyes were dark, slumberous, liquid; her lips and cheeks full, crimsoned with

health and not coarsely rich. She was already a woman in the full tide of young life.

"Hello, *Barnee*," her voice came full, deep, like that of the woman. "Ai'm glad you come."

She came to him with a gliding, easy grace, reaching her hands out to him.

Barney took her hands, drew her to him carelessly, gave her a passing kiss, and brushed by her with scarcely a word. He went out of the door by which she had entered and left her with her mother. As the door slammed behind the young rancher, the girl turned to Greasewood Kate with eyes that blazed.

"He—he kiss no more same as he did. He's—a not goin' love me some more."

"You are a fool, *Ess-Way*," her mother said, but she drew the girl to her for a moment and patted her glossy braid. "*Barnee*, he's had anoth' fight weeth hees pap. He'll be back. You must not mind, *Ess-Way*. He promise me again he marry you when he's—a boss on Ox Bow."

The girl straightened her shoulders and drew away from her mother, saying:

"He's—a goin' marry me, yes! We're white and Mex, yes. But we're Indian, too. Let *Barnee* keep that to his mind."

She turned and went down to the passage toward the out-of-doors. Her mother glanced through a side window and smiled to see her, a moment later, mounted astride, galloping off on a horse, riding it without saddle and with only a twitch-rope about its lower jaw, Indian fashion.

"She said right; we are Papago," the mother thought as she saw the girl go out of sight over the nearest roll of the open prairie.

CHAPTER IV.

WHY BARNEY WANTED CASH MONEY!

ALTER supper Barney Barnquist, his face smoothed out, a smile of bluff good-will on his lips, lounged out toward the bunk-house. He called to Maltrane, who, with several other hard-faced men, was lounging before the building:

"Hey, Mal, get out my fancy saddle an' lil brown mare?"

"Sure, boss," Lars Maltrane responded quickly. While he went for the saddle and to the corral for the mare, Barney joked with the men. He carried himself with a bluff assurance that seemed to take well with them, and most of them seemed anxious to please the young cattle prince.

Soon he was in the saddle, riding away toward the main trail. Instead of turning toward Coppered Jack, however, he turned southeast.

"Off to Mescalero Pedro's again," laughed Maltrane. "Off to th' Chaparral Cock, eh?"

"Yes, an' Pedro's got a new gal there that's a stringin' him along, or my name's not Weaver," the spluttery, slim little man joked.

There were many sly laughs and nudges.

"Half th' Mexicans—the men—are wild over the new woman Pedro's brought up from Las Alamos to tend bar, an' half th' women here are jealous a'ready," Maltrane said.

Barnquist put his sturdy little mare to a brisk lope. She thudded the miles behind her. A full moon was coming later: now the open country was in the soft sunset afterglow. After a while the trail dipped into a draw, and at the mouth of it, on a little rise of ground, was a squatty, sprawling building, with outbuildings grouped about it—a typical roadside drinking-place of the old Southwest.

There was no reason why it should have been in just that place. It might have been in a hundred thousand others just as accessible or inaccessible. But there it was, a place to drink in, to lounge in, to swap lies in. And off behind, far down the draw, were hackberries and a spring under the fairly steep slope.

Barnquist found a few Mexicans dicing it; a cow-puncher or two drinking. Trade was dull, the woman leaning over the bar languidly. Barney swaggered in, after standing his well-broken mare at the tie-rail.

"Lo, Marettta," he gave the dark-eyed woman; "gimme a—a shot o' pulque."

The woman smiled, reached down bottle and glass, and spun them toward him. He tossed off a drink, threw a coin down.

She twisted a brown cigarette and held it up for him, after lighting it between her own lips. He giggled, put out a clumsy hand in a rough, callow attempt at an endearment. She drew back and laughed. She went to the other end of the counter to wait on a cow-puncher who called for a whisky. She lingered, listening to his compliments, while Barnquist glowered. She went back to Barney soon, lips pouting.

"Ah, Maretta," he pleaded, "talk to me—honest, I'm wild over you."

She laughed and went to answer another call. Barney sat down heavily.

The woman, over the shoulder of the new customer, shot Barney a glance of encouragement. He glowered, pretending to be miffed. But when the customer went, he stalked to the bar, bought another drink of something—he did not notice what.

They had the bar to themselves. She toyed with the young fellow as a cat toys with a mouse, pouting, advancing, retreating, now taking a puff from his cigarette, now lightly boxing his ears as he whispered some heavy bit of persiflage into the ear that she kept tiptilted toward him.

There came the beat of hoofs at the door, a quick command in Spanish. Spurs jangled; bells on a man's big hat tinkled. In through the door, lithe, agile, a Mexican strode. He paused a moment, hands in the folds of his sash, his dark, handsome face attentive, his cigarette curling its wisp of smoke about his features. The woman at the bar shot him a phrase:

"Ho, Pedro, come bere. Come, Señor Aguilar, come."

"*Sí, señorita*," and he came easily, gracefully, hands on swaying lips. The woman made him listen, motioned for him to put his head to theirs.

The three heads—the American's, the two Mexicans—drew together over the bar. Barney's voice sank to a whisper:

"Honest, now, Pedro, tell her I'm good for any money—"

"Maretta," with an air of candor, in low, wheedling voice, "what thees-a *señor* says is-a true. He is Barnquist, laik hees sayin'."

"Tbere, didn't I tell you?" Barnquist said, elated, louder.

"Well, then, eef you be Barnquist, how-a you soo stingee? You buy da dreerk, yes. But avra cow-puncher, hees got roll *cash* monce."

"Honest, now, Maretta, honest, I'll get a roll, like I said. We'll blow outa here, eb—down to Vernon, eh—have a go of it? I'll get a roll, a big, big roll—"

She puffed disdainfully at a cigarette that she rolled deftly.

"Maybe," she said quietly; "maybe. Now run away off, kid, an' grow to be a man before you-a come teasin' round me."

Barney drew back, his face working with rage, baffled passions struggling for the mastery. He cursed, spat, turned, and tramped out. As he went he heard the woman's laughter floating after him. He glanced back. Pedro was kissing the girl over the bar. A moment later the rattle of hoofs told of the young man's departure.

"Well played, my Maretta," Pedro complimented her in Spanish, starting back and beginning to laugh. "If we can get the young Señor Barnquist to free himself of his father's hand, he will come here, spend his money like water! Play him, then, Maretta, well and bard. Once he is in our grip, it shall go well with us. His father is too good a business man to let his men hang about our place. We get only the passing trade, eh? But once the young Barnquist is his own master, he will come and bring others after himself. When he is sole heir, if you keep him in leading strings by pretty by-plays, we will both be rich, my *dulce señorita*."

The little brown mare was quivering with pain and weak from hard usage when Barney Barnquist spun her up from the main trail and into the ranch yard. He swung off before the bunk-houses and stood still a moment after he had alighted. There was a light streaming from a door far down the line of outbuildings. The tinkle of a mandolin came to him. Barnquist smiled to hear it.

"Monte Joe's got 'em altogether, playing those fool songs of hisn," Barney said to himself. He uncinched the saddle, yanked the bridle off, whacked the little mare in the corral. He went into the saddlery room and flung the gear onto a peg, then

came out softly. He went along the bunk-house until he came to a window. He stood alert, lighted a cigarette, and leaned against the window casing, apparently idling. The mandolin tinkled; lights twinkled in the big house; a horse off in the home corral neighed.

Barney's arm stole inside the open window. His hand fumbled about in the gloom inside and found a thimble-helt that hung there. It came back. He opened it, and in the palm, as he made his cigarette glow to show it, was a .38 cartridge.

"You'll never miss that, Weaver, and it 'll do me a power o' good," he told himself. Then he went slowly to the door whence the mandolin was tinkling, looked in, joked, and said to Weaver:

"I'm just in; thought you fellows were enjoyin' yourse'ves, so I turned the mare into the corral myself."

He went away, whistling. Weaver thanked him. The mandolin tinkled.

Near the house a white form came from behind a bush. He paused a moment to chat with Ess-Way, then brushed by her, leaving her to stand there, her arms out. He switched inside, along the corridor, past the "office," then up-stairs. He undressed hurriedly, then tumbled into bed. Soon his deep breathing could have been heard by any one in the hallway outside. And was heard, for the half-breed woman came tiptoeing along, listened, then went down. Outside she found the girl, sobbing a little, leaning against the outer door jamh.

"Be quiet, Ess-Way," she urged; "he was only tired—went right up and to bed."

The girl soon followed, slyly, watchfully, and went up-stairs like a mouse. The mother sat on the door-step and watched her go—then went indoors again.

The ranch-house stilled; the horses ceased to move about in the moon-white home corral. The mandolin tinkled. The elder Barnquist came loping in from some quest and had his horse taken care of. All was quiet.

Barney Barnquist got up softly and put match to lamp's wick. He sat on the floor, the lamp beside him, working over an outspread paper. First he took out the purloined .38-caliber cartridge and worked and

worked at the nose of the ball until it came out. He wrapped the empty shell and powder grains in a wisp of paper and set them aside; he cut a nick in the nose of the bullet and laid that aside. Then, getting his own gun, a .45 side-throw-out pattern, from its holster hanging at the bed's head, he worked a bullet from the end of one of its shells, taking the shell from his belt.

Barney was careful not to lose the powder from that .45 shell. Atop of the powder he played a little wad, then he worked the .38-caliber bullet from the stolen shell on sop, swaging it into place with bits of paper. He worked a false crimp in the end of the brass shell-case, to grip the smaller bullet in as well as it could be done. Finally he was satisfied that the added wad would hold in the powder; that the ball would not rattle from the paper wedges and false crimping. Then he took the rammer of his gun from its socket and threw the oval cover off the discharge chamber of the .45's cylinder, poked into the cylinder from the front end and forced one shell out. He slipped the faked shell into its place, snapped the oval throw-out cover over the chamber it was in, raised the trigger to half-cock, twirled the cylinder until the faked shell was the one just before the hammer. So that, when the gun was next cocked, the faked shell would move into place, ready to be discharged. He sighed with satisfaction that a man feels upon completing a nerve-tense job, let the gun's hammer down softly, holstered the gun at the bed's head and then softly opened a drawer in his rough box-trunk in a corner of the room. He took out a fresh box of .45's, and opened them, abstracted six shells and placed them on the outspread paper. He got soap from the washstand, then a pencil. Sitting down, he proceeded to shave up the soap, then to knead it between his powerful fingers and thumbs. Soon he had it like putty. He split the pencil deftly with a penknife and got the lead out of it. He shredded the soft lead until it was powder—black, soft. He kneaded that into the soap and soon had a leadlike, fairly hard mass.

Then Barney took the six shells and worked the bullet from each. He kept the powder in the shells and, wadding it tight

with a little paper, proceeded to mold, on top of each shell, the semblance of a time-dulled .45 ball, from the lead-tinted soap. When he was satisfied, he had six apparently good .45's that were only blank cartridges in reality.

Smiling evilly, Barney took the six fake shells and wrapped them in a bit of paper. He pouched the discarded balls, the empty .38 shell, the residue of the leaded soap, and then he sat down on the bed's edge. Finally he got up, took them all up again and went to a corner of the room, wheeled the washstand aside as carefully as possible, and, reaching behind it, thrust the little parcel into a cranny there. He rolled the washstand back, then, grinning, went to bed again.

He intended to do away with the evidences of his manufacture of those fake shells later. But now he meant to sleep and soundly, for no one but himself knew of that hiding-place, he thought to himself, congratulatory-wise, just before somnolence claimed him fully.

CHAPTER V.

"WE GET PETERS—TO-DAY."

"**W**ANT to see you in th' front room," Barney's father said crisply as soon as the son had shown himself, smiling, easeful, about the ranch-yard the next morning. He winked mysteriously.

Barney followed. In the office he found Weaver and Maltrane waiting. The elder Barnquist locked the door, and the four gathered about the rough desk.

"I'm goin' on a hunch that Peters will be back in Coppered Jack," he informed them. "We're goin' in to-day an' get Peters."

"He'll be back, to swell around, after runnin' you off the street," Maltrane said, his cold eye glinting.

"Yes, I suspect so. I heard him saying earlier yesterday that he might be back to get fencin' an' staples to put up some wire he's been braggin' about putting around his two springs."

"Le's go over th' program again." Weaver suggested.

"You do it, Barney; you made up the scheme," Barnquist said flatteringly.

"It's easy enough, but I've thought of an amendment. Now, get it right: We get Peters inside, on the chance of a drink between him and I and pap. You two be in the back room. Weaver and you pop out together. Weaver fires. Mal, here, he has Peters covered. As Peters wheels, Mal, who never misses, plugs him, dead center, cold turkey. Weaver keeps pumping lead, each of his .38's nicked, and one of them goes in th' pile o' wet rags Barnum mops th' bar with. Dad lets off his gun once or twice. We swop guns, Weaver's for Peters's. When the crowd comes bulging in, pap's just plump had to shoot Peters, because the ornery cuss picked a fight after we made up, an' the nicked-nose balls from Weaver's gun proves that he didn't shoot straight, because pap plugged him first and he shot his wad wild, all over th' room. Now for my improvement. When th' break comes, to make sure, I'll grab Peters's gun arm—"

"You wouldn't have th' guts."

His father's voice came sneering across the boards at him.

"Now, don't nag, pop. You watch an' see."

"You pull that, pup, now hear me talkin', an' I'll give you some real cash money to spend—as much as—five dollars. Haw! Haw!"

Barney hung his head in humiliation at being thus bantered before even the hirelings. He noted their scornful smiles. His mouth grew hard. He got up and flung out.

The three continued to talk in low tones, perfecting their plan. Barney, outside, went toward the bunk-house. He strolled along, seemingly careless. At the doorway leading to Lars Maltrane's room he paused and glanced about. No one was watching. He went in quickly and found Mal's holster on its peg. It was there because at home there would be no need for the gun's use, as a rule. The young man drew out the gun from the holster. It was a new model. He put the throw-out open, flicked out the six good .45's. He fed the faked ones, that he got out of his pocket, where he had been carrying them, carefully wrapped, into the weapon, then carefully,

closed the throw-out again. He put the gun into its holster, fumbled until he found a match in one of Maltrane's coat pockets and came out, ostentatiously lighting the cigarette he got out with the match, so, if seen, it would be thought he merely had strolled inside to get a match. Then he went quietly toward the office again.

He came in to find the three at ease, the door open, as if plots and plotting were farthest from their minds.

"You're just in time, pup," the elder Barnquist growled; "le's go, boys; le's go and get Peters to-day. My hunch is that he'll be in."

The four clumped out. Soon they were mounted and galloping toward the main trail. As they flashed past the ranch-house a white form leaned from the window of Barney's room, fluttering a good-by with a dust-rag.

"That lil Injun gal's a dustin' your room, pup," Barnquist leered. "You ought to have pleasant dreams, if she hangs around your room like that."

Barney only scowled. He was moody all the way in.

At the wagon yard Barnquist's query yielded results; Peters, the yard-man said, was in—with his buckboard.

"What 'd I tell you?" the elder Barnquist said aside, to the three. "Le's go get him."

They went out on the street. Few people were about. The day was young. A Mexican dog or two skulked about between the houses, sniffing for bones. A burro off somewhere in the spaces back of the row of buildings brayed. The sun, brilliant, beamed down. Two men crossed the street farther up, close to the Thimble Belt Saloon of Parley Brown.

"One of those is Nicked-Nose Peters," Lars Maltrane said.

"And the other?" Barney asked.

"Seems familiar," Weaver champed on his pipestem, emitting a blurb of smoke.

"It's that cussed range rider from Vernon that threw his gun down on to me yest'day," Barney's father growled.

Just then they saw the range rider start back from the saloon toward the Coppered Jack Emporium.

"He's goin' back to th' store for some-thin', an' that lets us get to Peters when he's alone," urged Barney. "Come on!"

He started forward.

"Cussed if th' pup isn't gettin' brave," his father sneered, tailing after his eager son. The other two trod after their master toward Peters who, in front of the saloon, was whistling:

"It's a long lope to Chihuahua,
But a longer one to Yuba Dam."

As they came up, he saw them at a distance and dropped his hand to pistol butt, as if casually. Men who saw their attitudes edged back into doorways or between buildings, expectant of dazzling gun-play.

"We come to make it up, Peters," Barnquist called, now in the lead. "Come on in an' have a hoot in Parley Brown's joint; what say?"

The watchers' faces showed their disappointment over the outcome. ~~They moved.~~ They were all smiling faces. Peters's hand came from his gun's holt. The smile of a good-natured, if sometimes hasty, man overspread his face.

"You mean you're not lookin' for trouble?" he asked.

"Sure," and Barnquist stuck out his fist, friendly, invitingly.

"Well, I'll call it off, then," and Peters met his clasp. "We gotta live neighbors-like, Barnquist. I don't want no trouble. You got your plans 'bout that irrigation ditch an' th' water. I won't cross them. All I want is to be let alone on my little holdin's, with my gal, Ber'nice."

"That's a' right, Peters," warmly. "Say, le's all go into th' joint and hoot one together, eh?"

"All right, Barnquist," and Peters glanced over toward the Emporium. "I gotta watch for a friend o' mine. He'll be out in a minute."

"Come on in an' have a hoot now. When he comes we c'n have another," young Barney urged.

Peters wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He glanced at the Emporium again. No Burlane was appearing.

"Jus' a hoot together to show we're all friends," urged Barnquist, bluff, hearty.

"All right, let's make it a good one," and Peters turned, at Barnquist's side. They stepped through the open portal. The other three closed in after the two elder men, who were chatting, friendly-wise. Barnquist called ahead:

"Five o' th' best, Barnum, lively, now." Presently the Emporium's door opened. Burlane came out and looked toward where he had left his new-found friend. He came across the street, glancing up and down.

"Seen Peters?" he asked of a man leaning against a near-by doorway.

"Just went in there," he answered, pointing to the saloon's open portal. "With th' two Barnquists an' Mal an' Weaver."

Ed turned to enter. His face was clouded with anxiety. He could hear Peters's voice; noisy protestations of friendship that to Ed's ears had the ring of insincerity in them. He swung the door, when the man to whom he had spoken called:

"Hey, mister, th' Emporium's clerk's yellin' at you."

Ed turned back. The clerk met him half-way and corrected an error in change that Ed had not noticed. Thanking the clerk, Burlane turned toward the saloon's door again.

As he did so he heard *the sharp crack of a .38.*

Plunging forward, hand on gun-butt, Ed hurtled into the midst of dim, swirling chaos, blended with flashes of flame.

This is what Ed Burlane saw:

The head of Barnum, just emerging from behind the bar, back of which he evidently had been crouching during the battle. Parley Brown, in a far corner, moaned, his head laid open from the impact of some hard object. Against the side wall was Barney Barnquist, hands and arms folded, smoke eddying about him, his face sardonic, his eyes fixed upon something crumpled in the far corner. Behind the partition leading to the next room a hurricane of human wrath was venting itself. Ed plunged in there, guns ready. As he sped he had a vision of a gun on the floor before the bar, but he disregarded that.

He flung himself into the writhing mass on the floor—and found Peters on top. He bawled into his ear:

"Hell-a-mile, Peters, what is it? Lef up; it's Burlane."

Peters, panting, surged upright. The two men under him were groaning. Their empty guns were on the floor. The table, the chairs, were broken, the room a general wreck.

Ed swung his guns to cover the prostrate ones as he edged Peters out into the main room that by now was filling up with a swirl of eagerly inquisitive men. And by now young Barnquist was at the side of the crumpled form on the floor. Weaver, his pipe missing, Maltrane, his hard eyes daunted from glaring at the ends of Ed's steady guns, came out, obeying orders from the range rider.

"Now, what is it all about?" Ed demanded, dominating the situation.

"I charge that man with killing my father, after my father had made up with him, publicly, in full view of the town," Barney Barnquist said, pointing to Peters. "We come in here peacefully, to have a drink t' seal our new frien'ship. He turned on my father and shot him down. My two friends, Weaver and Maltrane, tried to overpower him—"

"Whyn't they use th' guns that's on th' floor inside, then?" Ed demanded.

"He was too quick—jumped 'em with fists."

"You bet I jumped them," Peters blared indiscreetly. "I hearn guns a barkin' behind me, to my side. I reached for mine. It was gone; some skunk had twitched it out o' my belt at th' first crack. I jumped for th' shooters jus' as they emptied their weepens. I sailed into 'em with fists and feet and teeth and claws—"

"You lie, Peters. You shot my father and started that side row to cover it up." Barney was erect now, the picture of outraged young manhood.

Ed holstered his guns with twin snaps of supple wrists. He strode to the prostrate form and felt for the heart.

"He's dead," he announced, and threw back the vest and shirt. The hreast, so exposed, was not bloody. The bleeding had taken place internally.

He examined the bullet hole intently a second while the people held their breaths.

"That's queer," and he felt in the vest pocket and drew out a few cigarette papers in there. He examined them, pocketed them and stood erect.

"Nothing queer about it," Barney denounced. "Peters here killed my father. I accuse him—"

"You lie," Peters thundered.

"No; I saw you shoot him—"

"It is queer, then," Ed said distinctly, his hands dropped to his gun's butts again, "mighty queer that a charge from a good, tight .38 like Peters has should throw a bullet keyholed, end over end instead of straight, rotating on its axis, as a well-sent ball should go from a good tight .38 inside this short range, isn't it?"

Barney scowled, thrusting his face forward, bending across his father's body to do it.

"What are you saying?" he demanded.

"Just this, kid," and Ed pointed to the breast of the dead. "See where the ball went in, tearing an oblong hole, not making a nice, round, drilled one? I've got cigarette papers that I've taken from this dead man's upper left-hand vest pocket, and they are in the line of the ball's flight. They, too, are cut; *not pierced with a round hole, but cut, keyhole like.*"

The people stared at the bared breast of the dead; at the tense faces of the two living that accused and denied in turn.

"I'll stay in town till Sheriff Harvison comes, young-timer," Peters broke the tension. "You needn't be 'fraid for me. I got friends here, a few. I'll train with them. You ride out home an' tell th' gal what's up."

"I'm with you, all the way through on this, old-timer," Ed said warmly. "We'll go down the trail with this, and we'll go *clean through!*"

CHAPTER VI.

COLD GUNS—AND HOT.

AS Ed dropped Peters's hand he thought of something. He brushed through the increasing crowd in the barroom and sought for the gun he had seen on the floor as he had leaped into the rear room

to get at the center of the human whirlwind. He found it, kicked into a corner by careless feet. He grabbed it, then snapped behind the partition to pick up the two empty weapons on the floor there. He brought them out. His acts had been followed closely by several pairs of keen eyes, as Ed wished them to be. He laid the three guns down the bar and called:

"Hey, Peters, one o' these is yours. Which is it?"

"That one," and Peters's stubby forefinger indicated his own gun.

Burlane felt of it, then passed it over to an open-faced, good-humored-seeming Coppered Jack Man.

"I call on you, neighbor," he said, "to see that this weapon's cold—fully loaded—"

"Hold on, there," the Coppered Jackian objected, "It's cold, but there's one shell exploded," spinning the cylinder so he could make sure.

"Yas, one's exploded. I killed a hen-hawk out to my place this morning w'en I was down to get the hosses to hitch to th' buckboard. You heard me shoot, Burlane."

"Yes, I heard you shoot—"

"Whyn't you put out th' spent shell an' a new one in, then?" objected young Barnquist, striding over to the bar.

"That's it; why not?" several of the Coppered Jack storekeepers demanded. The Barnquist money and influence was making itself felt.

"I was in a hurry—an' I wasn't countin' on no rookus in town," Peters replied. "Leavin' my gun so, carelesslike, shows I wasn't after war."

"An' ef you was, Nicked-Nose," the man who had the gun said heartily, "you'd on'y needed one shot. I don't believe Peters shot Barnquist."

"Thanks, Wickson," Peters said slowly.

"You don't horn in on this, Wickson," Barney Barnquist scowled at the new protagonist of the accused. "There's still a Barnquist alive—"

"You'll chaw a lot o' beef before you're as hefty as your dad," Wickson flashed back.

There was a hum of talk at this thrust. Young Barney's cringing demeanor toward

his father was well known. He felt that he had not proved himself yet, and that something was needed to set him up in the eyes of the hard-bitten men with whom he had to deal and over whom he meant to reign, as his father had. The huddled heap in the corner already was passing from his cunning, ambition-spurred mind. There never had been affection between father and son, and the fact that his father was dead did not grieve him enough to overshadow the possibilities of his new position.

"Now, these two guns," Burlane cut in with, shoving the .38 and .45 along the bar to Wickson, who picked them up, after passing Peters's gun to another man. "Look at and feel of these two. Each of them is hot—mighty hot. All empty?"

"Yes, hot, empty," Wickson began, screwing one brown eye at the end of each cylinder in turn, as he twirled them, hammers half up. "And a dirtier gun I never saw than this," holding up the .45.

"Smeared with something all in between chamber and barrel butt, and blacker 'n a Bay skunk," his neighbor informed the highly interested crowd.

"This is yourn, Lars Maltrane?" Wickson demanded.

"Yes," and Maltrane stepped forward, "it's mine, an' poorer shootin' I never done. When Peters began to pump at th' boss, I opened on him, an' I fired six times an' never hit a thing."

"That's as fishy a story as ever was told, 'Mal,'" Peters bellowed, his fist going under the other's nose. "You, that's counted th' best in this end o' San Felicé, firin' six times at me, short range, an' missin' ever' time! You tell that to some tenderfoot an' hear him laugh."

"Then there's that other hot gun," Burlane suggested.

"Weaver's," Peters declared. "We ordered our guns, mail order, same day. They cum together."

"Yes; I shot my wad, too, before Peters came in to us," Weaver admitted.

"Another good shot fires six times at me, close range—an' misses six times—"

Peters glared at them, at the crowd. Men began to take sides, to whisper, pro and con. Burlane strode over to where the

dead man was and bent over to come up with Barnquist's gun.

"Dead cold," he informed them. He laid that gun, too, on the bar, where several verified his words by feeling of the weapon of the deceased cattle baron.

"Barkeep," Barlane demanded of Barnum, "where's your gun?"

Barnum reached under the bar, got it and slid it along to join the others.

"Dead cold, all loaded," Burlane judged, feeling of the gun. He glanced about, seeking for some one else. Then he called:

"Where's th' joint's boss; what's his name?"

"Brown, Parley Brown," and the saloon's proprietor came to the center of the crowd.

"Oh, yes; you're the man I saw on th' floor, like you'd been knocked out, as I came belchin' in?" Burlane inquired.

"Yes; he's that same man," Peters said. "He got in my way when I started with bare hands toward those two in th' other room that were shootin' to'rd me when I turned in at th' first crack out o' th' box. He got in my way. I give him one lick—jus' one."

"Never mind that," Ed said shortly. "Le's see your gun, too, Mr. Gin Seller."

"Yes, show it," several in the crowd commanded.

Brown unholstered his gun and laid it with the others.

"Cold, all chambers full; not been shot since last cleaned," Ed decided. The weapon, a new, bright one, showed for itself, at a glance, what Burlane had stated.

"Now," Burlane called, "where's your gun, Barnquist?"

He glanced about, as did several others. Barnquist was not at the bar. In the shifting back and forth of people, looking at the guns and the actors in the drama called to the center of the stage, he had disappeared.

"Hey, Barney; Barnquist—"

It was Lars Maltrane.

"Here I am," and the young heir to Ox Bow came in from the street. "What's wanted o' me?"

"Le's see your gun," Burlane demanded. "Put it right on th' bar where all Coppered Jack c'n see it."

"Oh, yes," and he unholstered it and laid it down. "I didn't think you'd want my gun. But here it is. A .45, side-throw-out. Pap was killed with a .38."

"How do you know?" Burlane cut in like a flash.

"Why, th' hole in him—"

"It takes a mighty good eye to tell th' difference between a .38 hole and a .45 hole in a man's skin—"

"Oh, no; a .45 is bigger, ever' way—tears a bigger hole—"

"Not when th' bullet keyholes; a .38 would tear a bad hole thataway."

Burlane snapped up Barnquist's gun.

"Warm, not hot," he said quietly; "all chambers full. Looks clean—but it's about as warm as it would be after ten minutes, an' after one chamber had been fired."

"Yes; it's warm. I half drew it when you came in, guns bulgin', an' have had my hand on th' butt, finger on trigger, thumb over hammer, most o' th' time since, after you turned your back an' began to argufy 'bout this affair. That nacherally would warm up th' gun some."

"Yes, *some*," Ed agreed.

"An' what 'd I want to shoot my pap for—"

"No one 's said you did—*yet!*"

Burlane's face was thrust out; his jaw set. His eyes met those of his adversary.

"An' for a man that's just lost a good dad, you're displayin' mighty little interest in his remains," Ed finished.

"You talk like a lawyer," Barney replied steadily, glancing about with an injured air. "We Barnquists don't sputter about family affection a whole lot. Pap, be's dead; I'm interested now in gettin' his killer hanged."

This was a clever shot; an explanation of his conduct that Coppered Jack would understand. Many men murmured approval. Hearing this, Barney next did just the right thing from his standpoint; he walked to the corpse and bent over it with a show of rough affection.

"Help me to lay him out, boys," he pleaded. "When I went outside it was to send a rider on a hell-bent lope to Harvison, the sheriff. He ought to make it—and

back—by sundown. Help me to get pap off'n th' floor an' on to th' bar, so 't th' sheriff and coroner can view him."

Burlane and Peters were among those who helped. The truce was tacitly accepted as being in operation, pending the arrival of Harvison and the coroner. So many volunteered that young Barnquist did not even touch the body in the ordered confusion of the ministry of pity. He sat down heavily, the picture of filial grief.

Peters went over and extended his hand.

"You, here, Barney," he began. "I don't know who or what kilt your pop. Him an' me had our ha'sh words. We made up an' come in bere for our drinks together. Le's not have any bad blood—"

"You git away from me," Barney snarled, pushing aside the proffered hand. "You shot him, cold turkey. How Mal an' Weaver cum to miss you, I don't know. You git away."

Peters turned to the crowd.

"I'm on th' limits, boys," he said; "I won't quit town till this is cleared up. You know me an' my word's good. Runnin' away would be th' fooliest thing I c'd do, anyways. My gun's in evidence, on th' bar. I'll stick 'round here till Harvison and th' coroner comes."

"An' I'll ride out to your place at Twin Springs," Ed Burlane announced, "and break th' news to Berenice."

"Thanks, young-timer. Tell her to do th' best she c'n till I'm with her again."

Burlane shook Peters's hand again and went out. Wickson spoke up.

"Peters, you come with us; we'll be responsible for you. You can eat and if needed, put up at my house to-night."

"Thanks, Wick. I'll go you; I'll stay inside th' town an' meet all comers on this."

They linked arms and went out. A half-dozen grim, gaunt old men followed. The younger element, glimpsing the far-off benefits from the new heir's opening reign, remained to offer encouragement and sympathy to Barnquist, who received both with just the right degree of interest and rather bored affability to catch the public regard, adding a subtle touch of manly sorrow.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

Teach: Pirate De Luxe

by C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne



THE first of C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne's series of stories detailing the adventures of "Teach: Pirate De Luxe," was printed in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, issue of May 22. One will appear in each of our issues throughout the summer months. While each story is complete in itself, all are concerned with the adventures of that likable blackguard, Captain Teach—descendent of the notorious pirate Blackbeard—and charming Mary Arneliffe.

V—THE DESERT ISLE : ANNEXATION

THE gun-fire apparently sprung out of the empty sea.

Before the mist came on, the ugly screw-pile lighthouses which marked the coast of Florida, were clearly visible, growing apparently out of the sea. And there were the patches of bubbly yellow weed, and the bits of wreckage, and the other flotsam that the warm Gulf Stream always carried with it on its journey to the north.

Excepting for these, and a five-masted schooner with a heavy deckboard, with Yankee written all over from her gaff-top-sail halyard-blocks downward, the evil-smelling steamship Saratoga and her people had that section of the Florida Channel to themselves. But undoubtedly shells were being fired out of the fog from somewhere, at somebody.

The fog at first had been a thing of wreaths and whorls. But out of nowhere and—apparently—nothing, these had fattened apace, till the sunny twinkle of the

blue water was obliterated by a scum of what looked like cotton wool. But then the scum grew, upward.

Once or twice they saw spits of fire that stabbed through the fog, but for most part the gun-fire was only indicated by the sharp crack of the propellant explosive, and the yell of the bursting shell.

"If that darn war hadn't ended," said his chief officer to Captain O. P. Crump, "I should say there was a Hun submarine operating in this section. As things are, I give it up."

"That's useful of you. I wish to gee I was past Hatteras. Always have bad luck in the Florida Channel. Bumped into a whale last trip. Hit a sponge-boat full of Bahama darkies trip before.

"I'd never be surprised if the Tropic of Cancer didn't get adrift, and tangle my propeller—Hellup! What's that? Six points starboard, quartermaster."

"That" was a six-inch shell, which burst

squarely against one of the foredeck winches, and emitted a tornado of whistling steel.

"Hully gee!" remarked Captain O. P. Crump to his chief officer. "This is getting worse 'n baseball for danger to spectators. I'll have to have that citizen fined unless he grows more careful with his shooting.

"Just step down to the wireless-room, Mr. Olsen, and call up creation, and tell them the tale. Say we're frightened, and lunch is getting cold. Oddstash it, that feller yonder must think he's in the Balkan States by the gay manners he's showing. Gee—gee! Here's Mr. Sparks himself attacked by spasms."

The wireless-operator, white-faced, clambered onto the high, upper-bridge. He handed a scribbled message. Captain Crump read:

Have got your range nicely. Stop engines, or will blow you to glory.

"There was a signature," the wireless-operator added, "but somebody jambed me, and I couldn't take it."

"Gee! Gee! Gee!" commented Captain Crump. "Reads like a dime novel."

"If that war was still on," his chief officer suggested, "I should guess there was a Fritz submarine somewhere in that fog. But as the war's over it can't be."

"You'll never make a corner in being helpful, Mr. Olsen," said his superior sourly. "Gee whiz-pelt! There's another of the blighted shells shaking the point off'n my smoke-stack!

"Say, you, Sparks. Get busy and ask our unknown correspondent for name and address. Say—hellup! There's another shell scraping the counter—say I am ready to talk sense on business lines. There, away with you, and get that on the ether, and I'll give you some more—yes, Mr. Olsen?"

"I was just thinking," said that officer after a pause, "this sort of thing ought not to be allowed. It's like the old Florida Channel pirate yarns we used to read about as kids. It's out of date. It's enough to make a party that could write send a letter to the New York *Herald*."

"You'll have a mental breakdown," said

his captain viciously, "if you use up gray matter at your present rate. Hell! A splinter from that last one has smashed my arm. Ring off engines, Mr. Olsen, and see if that will soothe him."

"Engines stopped," said the chief officer, reporting the obvious. "But if it had been me I should have wanted to know a bit more about the party that was talking before I did what he said. I believe I told you, cap'n, that that war's ended now good and real—"

"If you don't get off this bridge in two twinkles," said Captain O. P. Crump, "I'll tear up a stanchion and brain you—you— you Scandinavian decimal! Whilst you're away, just drown yourself. I'll send a wreath."

Once more the wireless-operator clambered up on to the bridge. His face was livid with paleness.

"I've got the name of the gentleman who sent that last message, sir. It was the great Captain Teach, sir, himself."

"Why 'great,' Sparks my lad? And how do you guarantee the 'himself'? You haven't seen him through your receiver, have you, by any chance? Gee! I didn't know wireless had got to that pitch!"

"And he says, sir, you've got to go through the hole in the wall or he'll sink the ship, and drown the lot of us. That meaos we're all going to be murdered. N-no man could t-take a steamer through a h-h-hole in a wall."

"Quit trembling, you blithering coward! The Hole in the Wall is the passage out of the Florida Channel south of Abaco in the Bahamas. Outside is about the emptiest spot in all the Western Ocean, except, maybe, some fancy bits of the arctic.

"Here, you! Pull your shaking wits together. Was that all the message?"

"You are to report course, sir, and distance run every five minutes by wireless. You are to steam ten knots exactly. If you make a mistake of so much as a foot, he'll sink us without further notice. Oh, Lord, sir! You will be careful?"

"Get off my bridge, you miserable shiverer."

"Yes, sir. But there's a bit more yet, sir."

"Hully gee! Get out the lot or I'll strangle you with the one arm I've got left."

"He says, sir, if you'll give him thirty thousand dollars, United States currency, or its value in jewels he'll let us go. Oh, sir, do pay up and get us off. That diamond tie-pin you wear to go ashore in would fetch half the money."

"Well if it deceives your eye it is better than I thought. But it's a dud all the same, Sparks, my lad, and worth a matter of cents. The chart-house cash-drawer contains in hard money seventy-three dollars and ten cents. I know, because I wanted to buy a hundred-dollar chronometer from another captain in Tampico, and was shy on the cash. We must just go out where Captain Teach orders, and take our gruel."

Captain Crump took a glance at the chart, spoke to the engine-room through the voice-tube, and gave his quartermaster a course that would take the odoriferous Saratoga to the Hole in the Wall.

"Now, then, Sparks, get away to your instruments, and see if you can pick up any more news."

"Would the owners, sir, repay that thirty thousand dollars if any one on board advanced it so as to buy off Captain Teach?"

Crump gritted his teeth at the pain in his arm, and looked at the man queerly.

"Has your blue funk made you go balmy, Sparks?"

"Sane as ever I was, sir. It's a plain business proposition I've got in mind, sir. If that thirty thousand was advanced, and the Saratoga ransomed, would the owners repay the money, with perhaps reasonable interest?"

"It's a bit of a problem. They do not part easily."

"Would you give a writing, sir, that they would have to pay if the money was found?"

Captain O. P. Crump somewhat painfully lit a cigarette with his one hand, and wondered if there was some method at the back of the wireless-operator's madness.

"If it will please your unknown banker, and annoy the owners, I will give a lien on the ship in consideration of the advance. I've got it in for those blighted owners anyway, by gee! for sending me to sea with

this load of stinking hides. How do you want it worded?"

"May I write it out, sir, seeing you've a hurt arm? I'll just scribble it on this signal-pad, if you'll sign. There, sir. Will that do?"

"You will see I have made it out as for cash or value to the extent of thirty thousand dollars, United States currency, advanced for ransom of steamship Saratoga from the pirate Teach."

The captain wrote his hard-outlined "O. P. Crump, Master," at the foot of the pad, and handed back the stylograph. "It's rather taking you for granted on ahead, my lad, as that is a receipt for moneys actually advanced. However, if you don't advance them, I take it you and I and the document won't show up in any court this side of New Jerusalem. Now then, where's the cash, if you have any?"

"Well, sir, it's stored away in a couple of bales of those hides just under No. 3 hatch. You see, sir, my name at birth wasn't J. Howard Pakenham."

"Looking at your dial, I never thought it was."

"No, sir. I couldn't alter that. But a name like Pakenham is a lot more comfortable to wear in New York these days than Pilliamobski."

"You bet," agreed Captain Crump.

"So I changed it. My old man didn't. You see, he speaks mighty little except Yiddish, so it would hardly have done. But he's a born merchant, and he's been using his talent 'way down in Mexico."

"He took good United States gold coin with him, and I guess a mighty little of that goes a heap long way among those insurrectoes 'way back behind Tampico. I don't rightly know which political party he favored; the old man has mighty strong opinions—till he changes them; but I guess he thought the same way as any Mex patriot who had some jewels he wanted to realize on."

"I get on to you," Captain Crump admitted. "And as Pop Pobbleobski hadn't any spare capital left over to lavish on the customs house of his adopted country, he just detailed off his bright and true American son, R. Howard Whatever-It-Was, to

run the goods through for him inside some of my stinking hides.

"I wisb Pop may use a pair of them as blankets till be croaks. You young swine, don't you know I draw commission on freight? How much have you done me out of? You'll square up for this dodge of yours, or—"

Swish—br-r-room!

Another shell burst with a roar just clear of the Saratoga's forefoot, and raised a waterspout into which she drove, and emerged streaming.

"Here, get back to your instruments, my clever boy, and tell your pirate chief that we guessed wrong the time before, and what we're hankering after now is to pay, pay, pay. Ask him to be polite enough to give us the name of his bankers, and who the check's to be made out to."

Captain Crump grabbed at one of the wireless-operator's ears with his available hand, and wrung it savagely. "You let me down again over this stunt, young feller, my lad, and I'll have that ear on my watch-chain. Now, get busy!"

Late that afternoon the steamship Saratoga, smelling venomously, brought-to off a certain desolate Bahama cay, as directed, and proceeded to lower a boat. As Captain O. P. Crump had not got an officer he could trust, and as he emphatically distrusted that astute financier, his wireless-operator, he took an inventory of the thirty thousand dollars' worth of jewels, and wrote alongside it weights as ascertained from his letter-scales.

He went in the well-manned boat himself, coasted for a while till he saw an oar stuck upright in the sand, and there landed. He made sure that the name E. Teach was branded on the oar, deposited the tin cash-box containing his ship's ransom at the foot of it, got back into the boat, and pulled off to his odoriferous ship.

Captain O. P. Crump had every prospect of losing his employment, and possibly his left arm; he would most assuredly be a butt for every newspaper in Christendom, and most of the journals in Germany; but he carried a stout heart, and whistled cheerily—if somewhat out of tune—as he steered

the quarter-boat to the vapors which hung round the Saratoga's gangway.

He was still to windward of the work-house by the value of one large solitaire diamond scarf-pin, which was by no means the "dud" he had described it as, but a portable asset which represented his life's savings. The eye of Mr. Howard Pilliamobski had not been in error. But the wits of that Oriental expert had been bluffed by the cold New England Yankee.

After all, a sound knowledge of poker is a great part of education. And the Florida Channel did not bring him complete bad luck every time.

I have given this episode of the unfra-grant Saratoga in somewhat full detail, because it is a very good average specimen of the work done by the crew of the five-masted schooner James Walter Cockerham.

Teach captured her with the Littondale, as it seemed to his crew, out of sheer wantonness. What possible use could he have for a schooner-load of lumber? One man questioned him on the matter, omitted the formal "sir" in his inquiry, and was shot for his pains and bove overboard.

Teach dug a gun-pit among the lumber, instaled therein one of the 6.1-inch weapons he had weighed from the Hun steamboat he sank off Lanzerote, added a frugal supply of ammunition, and called for volunteers.

To his annoyance there was distinctly no rush. His pirates had their qualifications. They were docile—if there was a steady automatic always to windward—they were plucky; they did not ask inconvenient questions, after they had discovered that curiosity was frequently fatal. But they distinctly lacked initiative.

So the volunteers volunteered because they were picked by Captain Teach, and because they had an internal feeling that if they did not smile and look gratified at his choice, worse would befall them.

Furthermore, to prevent their turning honest, and surrendering to the powers of civilization with a full supply of information as to their captain's recent doings, Captain Teach chose only those members of his crew who had a bad, criminal record.

How he got his details about these men

I do not know. But he got them, as he got most things he set his mind to.

In command of this pleasing cohort was one Titherby Puncheon, who once had sailed a yacht of his own. He was a man who had shirked service in the war and—by way of getting out of the frying-pan into the fire—had joined Teach to avoid the conscription. He had imagined himself frightened. When a sea-fight presented itself he showed a face of brass and the pluck of a terrier.

As I say, he went in command, and, as it turned out, could not do a day's work in navigation and never developed the least talent in gunnery. A little London pick-pocket, by process of elimination, made himself the James Walter Cockerham's gunnery officer, and—as has been instanced above in the case of the *Saratoga*—some remarkably bad marksmanship he exhibited.

One way and another, during her brief span of activity, in the Florida Channel, the James Walter Cockerham accounted for five ships. From the *Saratoga* and the *Het and Libby* she extracted ransom. The Robert Weatheral, which either would not, or could not, understand her demands, she sank. And the Edith Rickards and the Dorothy K. she sent off to a rendezvous in one of the quiet places in the outer sea, which will be spoken about later.

At the end of this period of usefulness came disaster. Two of the James Walter Cockerham's victims did not know who was either firing at them or sending such unpleasant messages by wireless. The other two did, and they spread the news.

Half a dozen United States destroyers, converging from various points, arranged the rest. They took no prisoners. Titherby Puncheon and his merry men, like others of their ilk, had no taste whatever for a hanging.

So they fought it out in style, and the unsinkable James Walter Cockerham was a very expensive prize by the time the United States navy had captured her.

In the meanwhile, both the aromatic *Saratoga*—as recorded above—and the *Het and Libby*—which, being log-wood laden, had a tropical odor of her own—as I say paid ransoms.

The point of payment on the track-chart before me is marked by a mere dot. The sailing directions say: "There are several small unnamed sand cays between these points. Navigation among them should not be attempted without local knowledge. They are uninhabited, are without water, and are frequented by sea-fowl and turtle in season. One of them was said to contain a treasure buried by the notorious pirate Blackbeard. This has not been authenticated, though several attempts have been made to discover it."

I have often wondered if this choice of the neighborhood of his grandfather's cache for his own deposit was a matter of chance on the part of our Teach, or calculation. I have no definite evidence on the matter, and shrink as a rule from guessing.

But when one remembers the millions of isles of the sea, the choice of this desolate Bahama cay goes beyond coincidence. There was a vein of romance in the man, intensely practical though he thought himself to be, and undoubtedly a pride of ancestry. One always recalls the affectionate way he gazed on Sir Godfrey Kneller's "Blackbeard" which hung on his cabin wall.

It is not of course every man who would care to boast that his great grandfather was not hanged in 1718 because providently he "went out fighting." But then, of course, one must carry in mind that all of us are not equal to the fatigue of tracing our pedigrees back so far at all.

Teach the first was the crude product of his times. All the world over, there were far more coins stowed away in stockings than deposited in banks in 1718. Teach of 1918 invested his loot in first-class securities as often as opportunity offered, and every scoundrel of his following had a comfortable bundle of script in various accessible hiding-places.

Wives, parents, and sweethearts came in for the golden shower. And the eight wives of Mr. William Pickles, the stout gunner, all found themselves in possession of such glittering incomes that they promptly—and somewhat unwisely, it seems—withdrew the unpleasant legal proceedings which led their William to resign his petty officership in

the British navy, and sent him to sea under the skull and bones.

Owing to the exigencies of the piratical profession, it was not every day that the investment market of the year 1918 was open to Captain Teach, and so he was forced, much against his will, to make temporary accumulations on board the Littondale and elsewhere. As he recognized that the Littondale, in her pursuit of duty, ran certain business risks, he did not overstock her with valuables.

He had various other depots afloat, of which more will be said later. He had one place of deposit—at that date—on land.

Chart and sailing directions, as I have said, leave the isle anonymous. Our Teach called it Tortuga Cay. He may have got this name from his great-grandfather. But I have an idea that he invented it, through sheer piratical sentiment.

Anyway, Tortuga merely means Turtle. And as the isle was turtle-shaped, and was the eggng-place of turtles, it was a perfectly legitimate piece of *onomatopœia*. (This particular member of the order of Reptilia is supposed to murmur the word *Tortu-ga* every time it lays an egg. But my egg-collecting friend is away in Sheffield, so I do not guarantee this.)

Now Miss Mary Arncliffe, as has been recorded before, had taken up residence on one of these sand cays, and had settled down as a householder. She subsisted on a diet of baked eggs and tepid water with an occasional tasty chocolate. When these sweetmeats first were delivered at her door, she tried one on a lady seagull to test it for poison, but observing no evil effects, kept the rest rigorously for home consumption.

Water was her main anxiety. The supply in the galvanized tank ebbed, and the art of well-sinking in the sand was beyond her. So when a derelict ship's life-boat blew ashore, she was very naturally seized with the itch for exploration.

The life-boat carried a full equipment of masts, sails, filled water-breakers, and so on, and, in her stern-lockers a notable supply of tinned provisions. Evidences showed that she had been burst violently from her davits by shell-fire, and here Mary saw

the dark signature of Captain Edward Teach. But the seas were large and seemed desolate, and Mary had some amateur knowledge of boat-sailing.

With trouble she got the foremast stepped and the lug ranged ready for hoisting. The boat, a heavy cumbersome thing, had grounded at about half ebb, and the young flood was making. She took a boat-anchor and line, and waded out with these till she was chin-deep, and dropped them. The boat strained on this line when the water lifted her, and was soon afloat.

She shipped her rudder, mastheaded the lug, got her anchor, sheeted home the flapping sail, and felt the thrill of gathering speed. Her personal luggage consisted of a pair of clocked silk stockings, and some gold-brocaded shoes with three-inch heels.

There were at least six cays in sight to choose from, all turtle-backed, all dull to the eye and equally unattractive. With the six-to-one chance against such a coincidence, I prefer to think that it was Fate which led her to the Teach Family's Tortuga.

Yes, I am sure it must have been something more than bald chance, because Tortuga lay dead to windward, and all women sailors have a constitutional hatred for a hard beat.

However, there are the facts, and you may diagnose them as you choose. The boat was a dull sailer, and sagged heavily to leeward, both of which are habits of life-boats as many a war-wrecked crew will testify. It was on the edge of dark when Mary rounded her to in a bay of sand, dropped the lug, and dumped her anchor into still blue water.

Sea-fowl creaked above the curve of the isle, and at intervals made grating comment upon the affairs of the universe, and it was probably due to some hint from these that Mary advanced with caution. She was a slim, athletic young figure, clad largely—I say it with a blush—in white satin knickerbockers and a crêpe de Chine camisole. The remains of her lilac-sprigged organdy muslin had been garnered from a hundred thistles by thrifty herring-gulls, and used for the lining of nests.

Her face and neck and arms and legs were burned to a fine mulatto color, and her

black hair was—she felt—deplorable. You cannot keep even bobbed black hair in condition without at least a comb. Toward the crown of the isle she dropped to her knees and crawled.

Mary had no definite reason for this stalk. When her heart commenced to thump, she told herself indignantly that it was absurd to be frightened on a desert island, and, anyway, she had only come for water and could do no harm to anybody.

But—well, she made her advance with every possible caution. And when finally she put her head through the final tuft of grasses at the top of the dune she was climbing, there, in the edge of the sea at the further side was a well-manned boat pulling off, and a steamer lying to the offing.

Mary's heart renewed its thumping with vigor.

Teach, she instantly jumped to the conclusion, was here, the brute! As a matter of fact, the steamer was the logwood-laden *Het* and *Libby* above mentioned, and hated the name of Teach every bit as much as Mary did. But that she could not know, and so watched the boat go alongside and get hauled up, and carried off into the sea and the night.

The cool darkness brought back her pluck. Also curiosity was mightily strong within her. What on earth was Captain Teach doing here?

She couldn't guess. But if he had any plan connected with the isle that she could upset, she wanted to be up and busy. So she scrambled to her feet, and ran down to the place where the boat had landed.

Here, stuck into the yellow beach, was an oar branded *E. Teach*. At its foot were two boxes. An assortment of old-fashioned jewelry was in the one—dull-looking stones in obsolete settings. The other was packed with crisp sheaves of hundred-dollar United States notes. A third of a kindly moon and a few million southern stars showed these clearly. She stooped and tucked the boxes under her arms, and then turned and stumbled back across the breadth of the isle to her boat.

She dumped her plunder on board, climbed after it, weighed her anchor, and poled the boat out of the gap in the sands

in which it was embayed. Then she hoisted the lugsail, and betook herself to the tiller.

She would not go to the island she had left. Teach knew about that, and might come to look for her there. No, she would go to that other island over to the westward there, where the lone palm-tree showed up against the sky. She had a feeling in her bones that somebody *must* come there to take her off in the course of the next day, or at the very outside the day after that.

And then her glance somehow traveled to the stern-sheets grating, and there close to her feet, was a parcel that she was certain had not been there before.

With twittering fingers she opened it. Good Heavens! Chocolates! Nervously she turned the box about under the moonlight, looking for something she dreaded.

Yes, there it was:

You see how I remember your tastes, my dear?

As you are going through your wardrobe so quickly, why not come to me for some more?

There was no signature, and none was needed. Mary chilled all over as she read, and then blushed hotly. The brute! He must have been on that very island she had just left. Well, anyway, she was sailing away with his plunder!

In the meanwhile Captain Edward Teach was lighting a fire under the politicians of Great Britain and the United States.

He sent his first signed message to the press, and the press of all countries published it greedily. He wrote:

The world seems to have conspired to call me a pirate. I am nothing of the kind. I am in supreme command of the navy of the Irish Republic. In the name of Ireland, I warn the navies of the other powers to let me go about my country's affairs without interference.

(Signed) EDWARD TEACH,
Admiral I. R. N.

"My God!" said the British politicians who were running things—and drawing the corresponding salaries—at the moment. "Here's a mess!"

"Gee!" said their opposite members in the great United States. "Stung again! And by those blasted Irish as usual. Gee—strafe 'em! Now what about it?"

Good References

by E. J. Rath

Author of "Elope If You Must," "Once Again," "Too Much Efficiency," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

WHEN Mary Wayne, reduced by the sudden death of her father to earning her own living, applied at the Brain Workers' Exchange for a high-class position, she discovered in short order that skill, efficiency and respectability were all useless without the employers' fetish, *references*; and as she had yet to fill her first position she had none.

Turning sadly away she met another girl, Nell Norcross, who, being fortunately abundantly supplied with the great essential, had just secured a particularly fine position with Miss Caroline Marshall, of an old and conservative family on lower Fifth Avenue. Nell, taking pity on Mary, insisted on taking her to lunch, and when later she, Nell, was taken ill and it became evident that it would be weeks before she would be able to work, she persuaded Mary to take her job, and incidentally her name and references.

Mary did so, and easily got the position, but discovered to her dismay that it was not with Miss Marshall personally, but as social secretary to her huge and vigorous nephew, Bill Marshall, a young man just out of college, who abhorred society, but was being forced into it by his rich aunt to maintain "the position of the family." Bill's position was peculiar. His aunt stood in the place of mother and guardian to him, and he was her only natural heir, but their ideas for his career were diametrically opposed. Also things were complicated by the fact that Bill had brought home a college friend, Pete Stearns, a practical joker of great genius, who, being of a family that Miss Marshall regarded much as a mountaineer regards a revenueur, had insisted as posing as Bill's valet, and who further insisted upon giving Bill a most enviable reputation, to his aunt, as a student and generally model young man. Likewise respectfully suggesting methods by which Bill might easily break into the loathed society.

In his extremity Bill partially explained matters to his new secretary, trying to make an ally of her, but was again interrupted by the irrepressible Pete with more suggestions, and during the mix-up that followed, Mary (or Miss Norcross, as she was of course now known) disappeared. Not, however, on account of Bill's language, as he feared, but to see Miss Marshall. She wanted to get hold of an idea before everything went amiss. She never needed an idea so badly in her life.

CHAPTER VI.

IN SEARCH OF AN IDEA.

BILL hunted for his valet with commendable industry. He searched his own rooms, the servants' quarters and every part of the house where Pete by any possibility might be concealed. He went out to the stable and garage. He made inquiries among the maids. But he did not find Pete, which was an excellent turn of fortune for that young man. Bill was more than angry; he was primed for conflict.

"I'll stand anything within reason," he told himself, "but if Pete Stearns thinks he can ruin me offhand he's got to lick me first."

He gloomed around in his room until it was time for luncheon, and went downstairs to find Aunt Caroline and Mary already at the table. Bill held them both under suspicion as he took his seat. He glanced from one to the other, searching for some sign that would betray a conspiracy. But Aunt Caroline appeared to be her usual placid self, while Mary Wayne neither avoided his glance nor sought to

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for June 12.

meet it, nor did she in any wise behave as might a young woman who had guilt on her soul.

Bill ate stoically. Curiosity was burning within him; he wanted to know what Pete Stearns had been saying to Aunt Caroline. But he feared to ask; somewhere there was a flaw in his moral courage whenever he was in the presence of his aunt.

He really had a morbid desire to know the worst, but lacked the hardihood to seek the knowledge boldly. So for a while there was nothing but perfunctory conversation between Aunt Caroline and the social secretary, with Bill affecting preoccupation but listening to every word.

"Miss Norcross tells me you have been discussing plans, William," said his aunt, suddenly turning the talk.

"Huh? Oh, yes; certainly."

He directed a sharp glance at Mary, but it did not reveal to him anything that suggested an uneasy conscience.

"I am glad that you are losing no time," continued Aunt Caroline. "Have you decided on anything definite?"

"Why—nothing's positively settled, Aunt Caroline. Takes time to get started, you know. It's a sort of a closed season in society, anyhow. Isn't that so, Miss Norcross?"

"It is not as active as it might be—in town," said Mary diplomatically.

"I suppose it is true," observed Aunt Caroline. "Yet, of course, opportunities can be found. I had what seemed a really excellent suggestion this morning."

Bill laid his fork on his plate and waited grimly.

"It came from that nice young man of yours, Peter."

The social secretary was diligently buttering a piece of toast; she did not appear to be interested. Bill knew what that meant—Aunt Caroline had already told her. Everybody was taking a hand in planning his career except himself. It was enough to make a red-blooded American explode.

"Well, I'll bite, Aunt Caroline. What did he say?"

"William, please avoid slang. Why, he

spoke about the social possibilities that lie in charitable and religious work."

Bill gripped the edge of the table and held on. He felt certain that his brain had flopped clear over and was now wrong side up.

"What he had in mind," continued Aunt Caroline, "was killing two birds with one stone. It would give you an opportunity to combine society with other worthy enterprises. As I myself know, there are many people of very fine standing who are interested in the various religious and charitable organizations, while the extent of Peter's knowledge of the matter really surprised me. Through the medium of such organizations be assured me that it would be possible for you to meet some of the most socially desirable families. Of course, you would also meet other persons whom it is not so important for you to know, but that is a detail which would regulate itself. At the same time, you would have an opportunity to do some morally uplifting work."

Bill moistened his lips and stole a horrified glance at Mary Wayne. This time she was stirring her tea.

"Well, William, what do you think of the idea?"

"Preposterous!"

Aunt Caroline was frankly surprised.

"Absolute nonsense! Drivel!"

"William!"

"Well, it is. It's nothing but sanctimonious bunk."

"Now, William, control yourself. Consider for a moment—"

"Aunt Caroline, I can't consider it. Gee whiz, if I've got to go into society I'm not going to use the family entrance. I'm going in through the swinging doors or I don't go in at all. And I'd like to know what business my valet has butting into my affairs."

Aunt Caroline displayed a mild frown of disapproval.

"You must remember, William, that he is something more than a valet. He has been a companion in college and is a young man of very high ideals."

"I don't care what his ideals are—high up or low down. Let him mind his own business."

"But William, he has your very best interests at heart," persisted Aunt Caroline. "I consider him a very fine influence."

"Well, he can't meddle with me."

"Nobody is meddling, William. We are all trying to help you—Miss Norcross, Peter, myself—everybody."

"Say, who's trying to run me, anyhow? What is this—a League of Nations, or what?"

"William!"

But Bill was becoming reckless. The more he heard of this diabolical plot the more he was determined to wipe Pete Stearns summarily out of his life. How many were there in this scheme? He glared accusingly at his secretary.

This time she met his glance steadily. There was something so purposeful in her gaze that it held his attention. Her gray eyes seemed to be telegraphing, but he could not read the message. She flashed a side glance toward Aunt Caroline. With no apparent purpose she lifted her napkin, but instead of putting it to her lips she laid her finger across them.

Bill raged. So they had dragged her into the plot, too. Her part, it seemed, was to put a soft pedal on protests.

"I'm not going to be charitable and I'm not going to be religious," said Bill, defiantly. "And if you don't lay off me I'm not going into society, either. I'd sooner go to the devil; all by myself, if I have to."

"William Marshall!"

Bill was not looking to see how much Aunt Caroline was shocked; he was again looking at his secretary. Her finger went to her lips once more, and this time she also shook her head. She was slightly frowning, too. Well, what was the idea? What difference did it make to her whether he spoke his mind or kept a craven silence? Probably she was afraid of losing her job.

"Society!" jeered Bill. "Personally conducted by my valet! Me—hopping around in a pair of patent-leather pumps, lugging lemonade for a lot of giggling boneheads and saying 'Ain't it great!'"

Aunt Caroline was passing the point where her sensibilities were merely outraged; she was growing angry. Her fingers were drumming nervously on the cloth and

in her eyes was an expression that Bill had seen there before. But this time he seemed to miss it. Mary Wayne did not miss it, however. She sent him a frown of warning. And then she spoke.

"Miss Marshall, wouldn't it be a good idea if your nephew and I discussed this matter up-stairs?"

Aunt Caroline sternly regarded Bill and hesitated. Bill began bracing himself for combat.

"I think perhaps he doesn't fully understand the idea," continued Mary, hastily. "Perhaps there are some features of it that can be—modified. I'd like to have a chance to explain it to him more fully."

Aunt Caroline arose from the table.

"Very well," she said. "But you needn't go up-stairs to discuss it, my dear. You can discuss it right here; that is, if you are able to talk to him at all, which I am not."

She walked stiffly out of the dining-room, leaving Mary and Bill facing each other from opposite sides of the table.

"Well?" demanded Bill.

She leaned forward and regarded him with complete disapproval.

"You nearly spoiled everything," she said. "Oh, please—please can't you be more reasonable, Mr. Marshall?"

"Reasonable! Do you call that stuff reason?"

"I haven't called it anything. But don't you see that it only makes these things worse to quarrel about them?"

"You didn't even want to give me a chance to defend myself," accused Bill. "You tried to shut me up."

"I was trying to warn you to be more diplomatic."

"What's the sense of being diplomatic when somebody sticks you up with a gun? That's what it was; it was a stick-up."

Mary made a patient gesture of dissent.

"I don't think you handled it in the right way at all," she said, firmly. "You didn't accomplish anything, except to offend your aunt."

"Well, I'm not going to stand for it, anyhow. So what was the use of pussy-footing? You're all against me—the whole three of you."

Mary studied him for several seconds.

"Whose secretary am I?" she demanded.

"Why—mine. That is, you're supposed to be."

"Well, am I or am I not?"

"Of, if it comes to that, you are." He said it reluctantly and suspiciously.

"Very well. Then whose interests do I look after?"

Bill hesitated. He was by no means certain on that point.

"You're supposed to look after mine, I should say."

"I'm not only supposed to, but I do," declared Mary. "And I don't think that thus far you have any good reason to doubt it. I don't think it's fair for you to doubt it."

Bill was beginning to feel uneasy. It would be very embarrassing if she started to scold him.

"I'm not doubting it," he said, but none too graciously.

"All right, then," said Mary. "As your secretary I am looking after your interests first of all in this matter."

"But you've got a wrong idea of my interests, Miss Norcross. They've got you in on this scheme and—"

"Who said I was in on it?" she interrupted.

"But aren't you?"

"I am not."

Bill stared incredulously.

"But you're in favor of it, anyhow."

"I am not."

He spent a few seconds trying to grasp that.

"You're against it? On the level?" he gasped.

"On the level," she said calmly.

"Then why in blazes didn't you say so?" he cried.

"Because it wasn't the time or the place to say so, Mr. Marshall."

He was rubbing his ear in a puzzled way.

"Does my Aunt Caroline know you're against it?"

"I think not. We merely discussed it. I didn't express any opinion."

Bill rose and took a turn about the room. He stretched comfortably. He was breathing normally again.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "I'm glad they haven't got you hooked up on it. But you certainly had me guessing for a while."

Mary was smiling faintly as she watched him.

"You stick by me and I'll stick by you," he said, walking back to the table. We'll put rollers under Aunt Caroline yet."

"Oh, no, Mr. Marshall. Remember, you promised to make a beginning."

"Well, we'll put that valet on skids, anyhow."

Mary pursed her lips and considered.

"He has a certain ingenuity," she remarked, judiciously.

"What!"

"I think so. And when you come to think of it, there are really possibilities in his idea."

"Oh, glory! And you just told me you were against it."

"I am—in your case," said Mary. "But that doesn't condemn the idea. It simply means it might not work in a particular instance."

"I take it you couldn't quite see me breaking in from the religious angle."

"Not quite," she answered, and Bill thought her emphasis was unnecessary. But he did not dwell upon the matter of emphasis, because he was still overwhelmed with gratitude at the discovery that she did not belong to the cabal that had been organized against him.

"You see," explained Mary, "I did not take any side in the matter because I felt it was necessary first to find out what you thought about it. But you ought not to have been so emphatic. I haven't been here very long, of course, but I have already learned that that is not the best way to deal with your aunt, Mr. Marshall."

Bill was studying his secretary with new respect. He knew that she spoke the truth about Aunt Caroline, but he had never been able to put into practise the best method of dealing with her.

"I think we can let the matter rest for a while," she added. "Although, of course, it depends a good deal on whether we can make progress in some other direction. It's imperative to make a start."

"Keep me out of the charitable and re-

ligious game and I'll leave it all to you," said Bill, fervently. "But listen: don't start in with the idea that that valet is any friend of mine. He's dangerous."

"Then why do you keep him, Mr. Marshall?"

"Why? Oh, I'm—well, I'm sorry for him, you know. And I knew him in college, which makes it hard to turn him down. He sticks around in spite of me."

To Mary Wayne this explanation did not cover the situation. Peter the valet impressed her as a somewhat mysterious retainer in the Marshall household. But she did not press her inquiry. Instead, she asked Bill if it would be convenient for her to leave the house for a couple of hours that afternoon, as she had an errand to perform. Bill assured her that it would; he volunteered to drive her wherever she wanted to go, an offer that Mary declined with prim and hasty thanks.

Not long after that she was sitting at the bedside of Nell Norcross. The sick girl regarded her with feverishly bright eyes.

"I mustn't disturb you, of course," said Mary, "but the doctor says it is all right for you to talk a little. I need some advice."

"What about?" asked Nell.

"About how to get a young man into society when he doesn't want to get there. A rather violent young man, I'm afraid."

"A man!"

"I didn't explain to you last night, did I? You were too sick. Well, I'll tell you what has happened."

Mary sketched the affair as briefly as she could. Nell Norcross, rightful owner of the magnificent references, showed flashes of interest, but for the most part she lapsed into listlessness. Her head still ached and the medicine that she took every two hours tasted frightfully.

"Now, what would you do with a young man like that?" asked Mary.

"I—I don't know. I'll have to think." Nell turned wearily on the pillow and closed her eyes. "I—I'm afraid I can't think now."

"Any suggestion might help," said Mary, encouragingly.

Nell groaned and asked for a drink of water. Mary fetched it and again sat by the bedside.

"Just a single idea as a starter," she urged.

"Oh, give a party," answered Nell, irritably. "They all do that."

"What kind of a party?"

"Oh, any kind. I—oh, I'm so tired."

"Never mind," said Mary, soothingly. "I'm sorry, my dear. I won't bother you now. Perhaps I can think—" She paused as an inspiration came to her. "I know what I'll do. I'll call up one of your references on the telephone and explain that I need a little advice."

Nell turned quickly and stared at her.

"Oh, no," she muttered. "You shouldn't do that."

"But, don't you see—"

Nell was shaking her head, then groaning with the pain it caused her.

"Very bad form," she managed to say. "It's never done."

Mary subsided into a perplexed silence. If it was bad form of course she would not do it. She must be scrupulous about matters of form. More than ever she felt herself a neophyte in the social universe; she knew neither its creed nor its ritual.

"All right; I won't do it, my dear. There now, don't worry. The doctor says you're going to come out all right, but it will take a little time."

"You've—you've got to hold the job," whispered Nell.

"Of course; I'll hold it. I'll manage to get along. They're paying me very liberally and it's all yours, every cent. You see, living there I can get along quite a while without any money of my own. I don't even need to buy any clothes just yet. We can afford a nurse for you, I think."

But Nell shook her head stubbornly: she did not want a nurse. All she wanted was to be left alone.

Mary was saying good-by when something else occurred to her.

"It's just one question," she explained. "In case I should be asked about it again I ought to know. And I'm really curious on my own account, although it isn't any

of my business. What is it that they say about Mrs. Rokeby-Jones's daughter?"

Nell stared at her dully.

"The elder daughter," added Mary.

Nell was shaking her head again and reaching for the glass of water.

"Is it really something—awful?"

"Yes—awful," faltered Nell. "I—oh, please—"

"I won't say another word," declared Mary, hastily, but there was a note of disappointment in her voice. "If I should be asked again I'll give the same answer I did before."

"What was that?" mumbled the voice from the bed.

"I said I didn't care to discuss it."

"That's—hest. I never did, either."

"And I said that personally I never believed it."

Nell answered with a gesture of dismissal and Mary left her. As she descended the dark staircase of the boarding house she shook her head as if dissatisfied about something.

"I'm just as curious as Aunt Caroline," she thought. "I ought to be ashamed of myself. But just the same I'd like to know what it is that they say—and some day I'm going to find out."

CHAPTER VII.

VIA THE NIGHT COURT.

MATTERS were not getting ahead to suit the liking of Mary. Aunt Caroline was displaying mild symptoms of impatience because the ship that represented Bill's society career still hung on the launching ways. Bill himself would pay no attention to the business of getting it off. He was never at home at night and it seemed to Mary that he slept very late in the mornings. Pete Stearns was also missing from the household nearly every time that Bill disappeared. He was probably taking covert advantage of his employer's absences, Mary thought.

Thus she was left very much to her own devices, save for occasions when she found it advisable to consult Aunt Caroline. In the case of the latter, Mary observed a

threatening tendency to revert to the launching plans that had been conceived by Pete. Whenever she found opportunity she tried to impress upon Bill the fact that unless he helped to devise something else he would find himself forced to follow the charitable and religious route into society. But he waved all that aside in the most optimistic fashion.

"You take care of it," he said. "You're against it yourself; I'm counting on you."

The valet still puzzled Mary. He had an annoying way of appearing when Bill was not around, always ostensibly looking for Bill and always lingering when he did not find him. She could not deny that he interested her; he possessed an element of the mysterious, whereas Bill was as transparent as air. It was not easy to establish the precise status of Pete; Aunt Caroline contributed to that difficulty by lending him a willing ear on any subject to which he chose to devote his fluent tongue. His rank was that of a domestic servant; he even ate with the servants, which was something of which he bitterly complained to Mary. She could not help feeling that there was some merit in the complaint.

Yet she could not and would not accept him on a plane of social equality, although she did not wish to appear snobbish. The relative values of their positions in the household must be preserved, if only for the sake of discipline. She would not have minded an occasional chat with her employer's valet if he did not constantly convey the idea that he was about to step out of his character. He never actually presumed upon her friendliness, but he always made her feel that he was about to presume.

She had a sense of something like espionage whenever Pete was about, coupled with an idea that he viewed her work with suspicion and even derision. Certainly the impression that he made upon Mary was quite different from that upon Aunt Caroline. He never talked theology to Mary, although to Aunt Caroline he would discourse upon it until the dear old lady actually became sleepy.

As for affairs between Bill and Pete, there had been a truce ever since the

former threatened to throw his valet out of the house by way of the skylight if he dared to discuss any more social projects with Aunt Caroline. They did very well together so long as it was not necessary for them to play the parts of master and man for the benefit of the household; it was on those occasions that the ever-lurking devil within Pete Stearns took charge of his actions and speech. Outside of the house, of course, all barriers between them were down—and they were outside a great deal.

It was late in the evening of a difficult and dissatisfying day that Mary sat alone in the library, quite vainly trying to scheme something practical for the social launching of Bill. The only thing that cheered her was a faint hope that he would bring home an idea of his own, for he had told her that he was to spend the evening at a private and very exclusive affair. Aunt Caroline had gone to bed early, as usual, and even the valet had disappeared.

"I do hope I'll be able to do something very soon," mused Mary, frowning at a book she had been trying to read. "Poor Nell! She's too sick to help, and even in her bright moments she doesn't seem to want to talk about it. I never dreamed it could be so difficult. It's not fair, either. I came here to be a secretary and they're trying to make me a manager. And he simply won't be managed and—and I don't know how to manage him, even if he would."

"Ps-s-s-st!"

Mary jumped half out of her chair as she looked up and saw the valet standing in the doorway.

"Please make a noise when you walk, or knock, or do something," she said, sharply. "You startled me."

Pete made a gesture for silence, stepped into the room and swiftly surveyed it.

"Where is Aunt—where is Miss Marshall?" he whispered.

"She went to bed long ago."

"Good! Come on, then; we need help."

"Who needs help?" demanded Mary, impressed more by the mystery of his manner than by his words. "What's the matter?"

"The boss is in the hoosegow," answered Pete, his voice tragic.

"What!"

"Mr. Marshall—he's in jail."

Mary leaped to her feet and stared with incredulity.

"In jail? What for? How?"

"Caught in a raid. Come on; we've got to hurry."

"How horrible!" exclaimed Mary. "Is he hurt?"

"Only in his feelings," said the valet, "Get your hat; you're needed."

"But—where do you want me to go? What can I do?"

"Bail him out; get him home. We can't let his aunt know about it, can we? We've got to produce him at breakfast, haven't we?"

Mary felt appalled and helpless.

"But how can I bail him?" she asked.

"I haven't any property, or any money, or—"

"I'll put you wise to the ropes," said the theological valet in a hurried voice. "Come on. Aren't you willing to help?"

"Of course I am," said Mary, indignantly. "I'll be ready in a jiffy."

When she came down-stairs again Pete was waiting at the front door, which he closed gently behind them. In front of the house stood a taxi, into which he thrust her with much haste, following himself, after he spoke an order to the driver.

"Where are we going?" asked Mary, as the taxi gathered speed.

"Jefferson Market—it's a police court."

She could not repress a shiver.

"You said a raid? What—what kind?"

"Listen," said Pete. "Now this is what happened: the boss went to a scrap—a prize-fight."

Mary, sitting in the darkness of the taxi compressed her lips. He had made her believe that he was going into society!

"Fights are against the law in this State," continued the valet. "While it was going on somebody told the police. And the police came and, among others, they got the boss. He got stuck in the window that was too small for him."

"Oh!" gasped Mary.

"They'll be taking him to the night-

court by the time we get there. And we've got to hail him out."

"How?"

"We get a bondsman. There'll be one of 'em there; I've got it arranged. He's in the business; professional bondsman, you know. Only he won't put up a bond on my say-so. I'm only the valet, you understand; it takes somebody higher up, like a secretary. We'll get it across all right, if you put up a good front. Got any money with you?"

"A little," said Mary. "About twenty dollars, I think."

"That'll help with what I've got. We've got to give this bird some cash down."

Mary was bracing herself as rigidly as she could in a corner of the seat. It was difficult to prevent a rising tide of indignation from overwhelming her, although she realized it was a time to keep her head. Of course, there was but one thing to do—get Bill Marshall out of jail. But after that she felt that she would be entitled to a reckoning. How awful it was! Her employer—her social climber—her debutante—in jail after a raid on a prize-fight!

At Jefferson Market she was hustled out of the taxi, across the sidewalk and up some steps that led to a badly-lighted corridor.

"Wait here: I'll get him," whispered Pete.

Mary shrank herself as small as possible against a wall and waited. The valet was not long in returning. With him was a middle-aged, stout, red-faced person who swiftly inspected Mary with a piercing pair of eyes.

"This the dame?" he asked, in a casual tone.

Mary stiffened at the question.

"This is the lady I told you about," said Pete. Then addressing Mary: "This is the gentleman who is going to bail Mr. Marshall."

"Don't travel too fast," said the bondsman. "Maybe I am and maybe I'm not. Who are you, anyhow?"

He was looking at Mary with another critical glance. Her cheeks had become red by this time; to Pete he seemed to be growing taller.

"I am secretary to Mr. William Marshall," she said. "My name is Miss Norcross. And I do not wish to be addressed in the manner that you now assume."

There was a flash of dismay in Pete's eyes, to be succeeded by one of admiration. As for the bondsman, he stared for several seconds in a sort of dull surprise.

"Oh, no offense," he said. "Got anything to identify you?"

Mary opened her bag and drew forth some letters, which she handed to Pete. She would not permit this creature to receive them from her own hand. He seemed to sense the import of this employment of an intermediary, for he surveyed her once more, this time with what was obviously a more respectful curiosity. Then he began reading the letters.

Even a professional bondsman is permitted to have knowledge of the upper world, and this one was not wholly ignorant of names in the social register. His eyebrows went up as he read, and Mary was once more made aware of the potent magic of references. She continued to grow taller. When he made a move to return the letters she indicated that he was to hand them to the valet, which he did.

"I guess it 'll be right," he said. "The bond 'll be for a thousand. The prisoner himself is good for it, but I got to have additional security. I'll want you to see the prisoner when he's arranged, and if he ain't the right one, tip me off. And I'll take fifty bucks now."

Mary brought forth what she had and handed it to Pete. He played up to the situation by palming his own resources as he received Mary's contribution, and then began counting off bills that were apparently all supplied by her. The bondsman pocketed the money.

"Sign here," he said, producing a paper from his pocket.

Mary received the paper from Pete and examined it. For all she understood of its contents it might have been printed in Chinese. But nowhere did it mention Bill Marshall. It dealt with a defendant named "Henry Smith." She was being swindled!

"Give me a proper paper," she said,

sharply. "This has nothing to do with Mr. Marshall."

The bondsman grinned and Pete made the explanation.

"That's the name he gave on the police blotter. It's all right, ma'am."

So Mary produced a fountain pen and signed, dimly aware that she was probably committing one of the varied degrees of forgery. When she had finished, it appeared nowhere that Mary Wayne was going to the rescue of one William Marshall, but rather that Nell Norcross had undertaken to guarantee a bond that would open the jail doors for Henry Smith.

"Now we'll go up to court," said the bondsman, and he led the way.

Mary had never been in a court before, much less a night court, which is peculiar to itself in atmosphere and characters. She slipped into a place on a rear bench, anxious now to lose something of that stature she had attained during her interview in the corridor. The bondsman and Pete went forward and stepped inside a railing.

Mary waited and watched. The judge who sat behind a high desk was yawning. Two persons whom she took to be clerks were fumbling over papers. There were several policemen in uniform. On the benches about her were numerous and, for the most part, unpleasant persons.

Two women were led through a side door, evidently to be "arranged," as the bondsman said. They seemed at ease. A policeman said something, the judge said something, the clerks did something, and they passed on, still in custody. Then came a man, who followed the same routine; then another woman.

And then out of the side door, which was constantly guarded by a policeman, came several men—and among them Bill Marshall, towering almost proudly, it seemed to Mary. She listened breathlessly, but could not hear a word; everybody was talking in low tones. All she knew was that Bill was standing in front of the judge, and evidently unashamed. Pete and the bondsman were there, too, and presently the group moved over to the clerk's desk.

This, it seemed to Mary, was a critical

instant. She knew that they must be examining the bond; she felt as though she, too, ought to be standing there with Bill Marshall, a defendant at the bar. A sense of guilt was overwhelming her; if anybody had touched her on the shoulder she would have screamed. And then it was over, in a most perfunctory and undramatic manner. "Henry Smith" was not returning to the place beyond the side door, but was passing through the swinging gate that led to the space reserved for benches. His valet was at his heels. The bondsman showed no further interest in them; he stayed inside the rail, where he chatted with a policeman.

Up the center isle came Bill, swinging along jauntily. As he neared the bench on which she sat, Mary became aware that a young man who had been occupying a place beside her was as much interested in Bill as herself. This person suddenly sprang into the aisle, gripped Bill's hand and then linked arms with him. Together they passed out of the court-room.

Mary, too, had arisen, and now the valet was beckoning to her. She followed him out beyond the swinging doors. There in the corridor she observed Bill Marshall in one of his intimate and happy moments. He was laughing with a wholesome lack of restraint and was slapping on the shoulder one of the most ill-favored persons that Mary had ever seen. This was the young man who had joined Bill in the moment of his triumphal exit.

He was not over five feet six, but he was somewhat broader in the shoulders than most youths of that stature. His clothes seemed too tight for him, although they were not a misfit, but rather, the product of a tailor who must have received his inspiration from a brass band. His skin was swarthy; his dark eyes small and bright. His nose appeared to have undergone a flattening process, in addition to which, it displayed a marked tendency to point to the left. One of his ears Mary observed with particular attention; it had been twisted into a knotty lump and stood out from his head in an aggressive effort at self-advertisement. It was not within Mary's province to know that this was a

singularly perfect specimen of cauliflower, or "tin," ear.

"Oh, it's all right now, Bill," the young man was saying, "only if you'd 'a' took my tip an' follered me you wouldn't 'a' been pinched at all. Gee! I had an easy getaway."

"You always did have speed, Kid," remarked Bill. "Oh, well, it's nothing in our young lives. Where do we go from here? Where's Pete?"

He glanced around and beheld not only Pete, but Mary Wayne.

Bill slowly flushed a fiery red and his eyes widened to almost twice their size. He faltered for an instant, then rushed forward.

"Miss Norcross! Why, what in thunder—"

"I had to bring her, sir," said Pete, hastily dropping into character. "They wouldn't accept me as additional security, sir."

Bill hesitated. The cool gaze of his secretary upset him far more than if she had flung scorn in her glance.

"Oh, I'm awfully sorry," he began. "I wouldn't have had you come here for all the world. It isn't right. It's a shame! Why— Peter, how dared you bring Miss Norcross to this place? No: don't try to make any excuses. You ought to be thrashed for it."

"Your valet was not to blame in the least degree," said Mary, in a frosty tone. "It appears that it was necessary for me to come."

"Yes, sir," echoed Pete.

"I don't care," stormed Bill. "It's no place for her. I won't have it. I'd sooner lose a leg than have Miss Norcross come here."

But in his soul he was really not so much disturbed over the fact that she visited a police court as he was over her discovery of Bill Marshall as a prisoner at the bar, although he was not at the time capable of analyzing his emotions very accurately. He was ashamed, confused, angry at the presence of Mary Wayne, whereas but a moment before he was enjoying the relish of an adventure and a joke.

"Shall I get a taxi, sir?" inquired Pete.

"I'll get it myself. Wait here, Miss Norcross."

Anything to escape even for a moment from the level gaze of those accusing eyes. He dashed down a staircase, followed by Pete, who had a word he wished to say in private.

Mary now observed that the young man with the tin ear whom she had heard addressed as "Kid" was watching her attentively. As her look settled upon him he stepped forward, swiftly tipped a derby, swiftly replaced it on his head and favored her with a confident and confidential smile.

"Friend of Bill's, it seems," he observed. "Well, we had a nice evenin' for it."

"I do not seem to know you," said Mary.

He stared in honest astonishment.

"Y' don't know me?" he echoed.

"I do not."

"Y' mean to say Bill never told y' about me?"

"He never did—and I do not think I am interested."

His small, black eyes blinked at the astounding news.

"Why, I'm Kid Whaley. Ev'rybody knows me. Bill's my best friend. Wot? Y' never heard of Kid Whaley? Say, are y' kiddin' me? Why, it's only last week I put away Battlin' Schwartz. Knocked 'im dead in five rounds, over in Trenton. Say, don't y' read the papers? Aw, y' must 've heard of me. Sure y' have. Why, I'm gonna be the next champ. Ev'rybody knows that. An' take it from me, th' champ knows it, too. You ask Bill; he'll tell y' right."

During this outburst of sincere protestation Mary stood stiffly where Bill had left her. She would have preferred to walk away, but for the fear that this voluble young man would follow her.

"Aw, g'wan," he added, as he playfully poked a finger into her arm. "You're givin' me a josh. Any friend o' Bill's knows me. Why, he's crazy about me. I ain't been inside th' ropes once in a whole year that Bill didn't have a roll bet on me. Why, him an' me—"

He paused for an instant as he sighted the returning Bill, only to break forth:

"Hey, Bill; get this. Here's a dame

never heard o' Kid Whaley. Whadda y' know about that? An' she says she's a friend o' yours."

"Shut up!" snarled Bill savagely.

Kid Whaley stared in bewilderment.

"Come, Miss Norcross; there's a taxi waiting."

He seized her by the arm and urged her rapidly toward the staircase. Mary went willingly; escape from the Kid was the immediate necessity.

"Hey, Bill; y' comin' back? Hey, Bill—"

They lost the remainder of the Kid's plea as they hurried toward the street.

Pete Stearns was standing guard over a taxi as they emerged from Jefferson Market and, as he sighted them, he flung the door open. Mary permitted herself to be propelled into the vehicle with more force than grace, and Bill followed. Pete was about to make a third member of the party when his benefactor placed a determined hand against his breast and pushed him half-way across the sidewalk. Then Bill leaned out, shouted a direction at the driver, slammed the door and settled back with a sigh, prepared to receive whatever his social secretary might decide was coming to him.

CHAPTER VIII.

"MISS NORCROSS GETS THE GOODS."

AS minutes passed the silence became more than he could endure. Why didn't she say something? Why didn't she flay him alive and be done with it? He could stand that; it would not be pleasant, of course, yet it could be borne. But no; she sat staring straight in front of her, wordless, even oblivious.

"Oh, say—go to it!" he blurted.

"I beg your pardon."

"Have it out; hand it to me—mop me up."

She turned to look at him briefly as they passed a brightly lighted corner, then resumed her former pose.

"Well, aren't you going to?" he pleaded.

"I don't know that there is anything for me to say," she answered.

"Yes, there is; you're full of it," insisted

Bill. "I can tell by the way you're acting, I'll stand for it. Go on."

"I'm not sure that I care to, Mr. Marshall."

Her voice was not frigid; rather, it merely conveyed an idea of remoteness. It was as if she were at the other end of a thousand miles of wire.

"Anyhow, I'm sorry," he said.

To Mary that seemed to require no answer.

"Mighty sorry, Miss Norcross. I wouldn't have put you in that position for anything. I—I apologize."

But it appeared that she had again retired into the silences.

"Oh, be reasonable about it," he said in a begging tone. "Bawl me out and let's have it over with. That's the way Aunt Caroline and I do it."

"I am not your Aunt Caroline, Mr. Marshall."

"I know. But you're thinking just what she would think, so it amounts to the same thing. Please bawl me out."

"I don't know that it is one of my duties to do so," observed Mary. "I think perhaps we had better not discuss it at all."

Bill squirmed for the twentieth time. The air within the taxi was oppressive; he opened the window on his side with violent hands.

"Well, I apologized," he reminded her. "You might at least say whether you accept it or reject it or what."

"Why, I accept it," she said. "What else is there to do?"

"You might have left off the last part," he grumbled. "You don't have to accept it unless you want to. I'd sooner you didn't."

"But I already have."

"Well, you needn't."

"It's done, if you please."

Bill felt peevish. This was not a fair way of punishing him.

"If you're going to act that way I'll withdraw the apology," he declared.

"It is already accepted, so it is too late to withdraw anything, Mr. Marshall."

He was uncertain as to the soundness of this position, but it baffled him, nevertheless.

"Oh, all right," he agreed lamely. "Have it any way you like. I—I suppose Aunt Caroline will raise the devil, so I'll get it good from somebody, anyhow."

"You will tell her about it, then?" she asked.

"Who? Me? Do I act crazy?"

"Then you will leave it to your valet, perhaps," suggested Mary.

Bill involuntarily tensed his shoulder-muscles.

"Pete? He doesn't dare. I'd slaughter him."

"Then how is your aunt going to know, Mr. Marshall?"

Bill turned and stared down at her.

"Why—why, you'll tell her!" he exclaimed.

It was Mary's turn to look upward at Bill, which she did steadily for several seconds.

"Once again, Mr. Marshall, I ask you, whose secretary am I?"

"Miss Norcross!; You mean—"

"I mean that I do not peddle gossip," she said sharply.

Bill had seized her hand and was crushing it; when she managed to withdraw it, her fingers were aching.

"You're an ace," he said joyously. "I thought, of course—"

"I do not think you had any business to believe I would tell," said Mary. "If I have given you any cause to think so I'm not aware of it."

"You're a whole first full of aces!" he declared fervently.

But Mary had no intention of relinquishing any advantage that she held.

"I think I have been quite frank with you, Mr. Marshall, ever since I entered your employ. And that is more than you have been with me."

"Huh? How's that?"

"Have you forgotten what you told me this afternoon? You—you said you were going to a very private affair—very exclusive, you said."

Bill managed to twist a smile.

"So it was, until the police butted in."

"I assume, of course, it was social," said Mary coldly.

"But I didn't say it was. Now, did I?"

"You allowed me to infer it. And that is the worst way of deceiving people."

"Oh, well, I'll make an apology on that, too. But if I'd told you the truth you'd have tried to stop me. You'd have roasted me, anyhow."

"I should have tried to persuade you not to go," she conceded.

"Sure. I knew it." And Bill grinned.

The taxi stopped in front of the Marshall home. He helped her out, paid the driver and followed her up the steps. His night-key effected a noiseless entrance. Once inside, Bill beckoned her to the library.

"I want to thank you for doing all you did," he said humbly. "I feel awfully mean about it."

"About getting arrested?"

"No. That's nothing. About dragging you to court. It was a mighty square thing for you to do. I'm grateful—honestly."

"I simply did it for business reasons, Mr. Marshall."

"Business?" he repeated, with a frown of disappointment.

"Of course. Don't you see the point?"

He shook his head.

"It's quite plain," she said. "My business is to see that you enter society. That is the reason for my employment. Anything that would interfere with that is naturally also my concern. If you participate in a brutal prize-fight—"

"Oh, wait. I wasn't in the ring, Miss Norcross. I was only looking on."

"If you attend a brutal prize-fight," she corrected, "and are arrested, and the papers are full of it, and your aunt learns of it, what becomes of your chances to enter society?"

"I see what you're driving at," he said slowly.

"Your chances would be nothing, of course. And with your chances gone you would have no need for a social secretary. Therefore, I would lose my position. So you will understand that I had a purely business interest in the matter, Mr. Marshall."

Confound her! She did not need to be so emphatic about putting it on that basis, thought Bill. He was trying to make her see that she had done something generous

and fine, but she stubbornly insisted on having it otherwise.

"Well, anyhow, I'm much obliged," he repeated. "Next time I won't bother to send for bail."

"Next time?"

"Certainly. I'll just stay in the lock-up, let the newspapers fill up on it and then I won't be able to get into society if I try. That's not a bad idea, come to think of it. Much obliged."

If she insisted on being unpleasant about this, he would show her. For the moment, Bill was very much of a spoiled child.

"Well," retorted Mary, "there ain't much danger of your ruining your social career so long as you follow your—other—career under a false name."

Bill glared. "Oh, I guess you'd do the same thing if you got in a tight place."

Mary began to turn pale under the freckles. Bill had startled her without himself being aware of it. He didn't know; he didn't suspect; it was nothing but an offhand and ill-tempered retort. But it awakened in Mary something she had been studiously endeavoring to forget; it had been flung so suddenly at her that it sounded like an accusation.

"Take it from me," he added, "there's many a sanctimonious high-brow in this burg who sports an alias on the side. I've got plenty of company."

Mary was seized with a fit of choking that compelled her to turn her head. She was rapidly becoming confused; she did not dare trust herself to speech. Why, she might even forget her wrong name!

Bill watched her for a moment, then shrugged and yawned.

"Well, I guess I'll call it a day, Miss Norcross. You can give any reason you like for what you did, but I'm going to keep on being much obliged." His voice had taken a more generous tone. "You're all right. Good night."

Mary watched his exit from the library, a curious expression in her eyes. Then suddenly she sat down and began to laugh, very quietly, yet rocking back and forth with the intensity of the attack.

"Oh, what a job I've got!" was the burden of Mary's thought.

She was in no hurry to go up-stairs to her room and the reason for this was evident when she caught the faint sound of the latchkey turning in the front door, which brought her to her feet and sent her running softly into the hall. She intercepted the valet as he was about to make a stealthy ascent of the staircase and motioned him into the library.

"Where's the boss?" whispered Pete.

"He has gone up-stairs. I want to talk to you a moment."

"Yes, miss."

Mary looked at him sharply; whenever he addressed her in that manner she was filled with a sensation of being mocked.

"Does Mr. Marshall attend many prize-fights?" she inquired.

Pete clasped his hands and pursed his lips.

"Well, between you and me, miss," he said, after an instant of deliberation, "I'm afraid he attends about all there are."

"Has he ever been arrested before?"

"Not that I can recall, miss. I'm quite sure this is the first time since I have been in his employ."

"Is he in the habit of associating with pugilists?"

Pete sighed and hesitated.

"If it's just between us, miss, why I'll say that he has his friends among such people. It's a very shocking thing; I've done my best to keep it away from his aunt. So far I think I've succeeded. I've tried very hard to persuade him to change his ways. I've labored with him; I've tried to get his mind turned to different things."

"Theology?" suggested Mary.

"Exactly," answered the valet. "But it's not an easy matter, miss. Mr. William is very set in his ways."

"But I thought you had told his aunt that he was interested in higher things."

"To encourage her," said Pete, glibly. "It was not what you'd call a falsehood. There had been times when he seemed interested, but never for very long. Still, I've always had hopes. His aunt is good enough to believe that I have a desirable influence over him. I hope it's true; I hope so."

It always puzzled Mary when the valet pursued this strain, and it puzzled her now. Ninety-nine out of a hundred men who talked thus she would have classed as hypocrites, but Pete did not seem to her to be exactly that. She viewed all his excellent protestations askance, yet she was not satisfied that hypocrisy was the true explanation.

"It seems a shame," he continued, "that it was necessary to bring you into touch with such an affair as to-night's. I wouldn't have thought of it if there had been any other way. I knew that you would be very much shocked, miss; very much surprised, too."

He watched her so closely that Mary wondered if he really suspected the truth—that she was neither quite so much shocked nor surprised as both he and Bill seemed to believe. That was her own secret and she intended to guard it at all costs.

"This affair of to-night," she observed, "was it particularly brutal?"

"No; I wouldn't say that," replied Pete, reflectively.

"Had it been going on very long?"

"Not very long, miss."

Mary thought for a moment before she framed the next question.

"Just an ordinary vulgar brawl between two ruffians, I take it?"

Pete unclasped his hands and made a quick gesture of dissent.

"Not at all; not at all. Why, it was a pip—"

He pulled himself up short and coughed. There was a gleam in Mary's gray eyes.

"Fortunately, it had not progressed far enough to become actually brutal," said Pete, and he showed for the first time since she had known him a trace of confusion.

"What were you doing there?" she demanded.

Pete soothed out a wrinkle in the rug with the toe of his shoe before he decided to meet her glance.

"It happened this way: I knew where he was going and I was trying to persuade him to stay away. You see, his aunt expects a great deal of me, miss, and I didn't want to do anything less than my duty. I followed him; I argued with him. In

fact, we argued all the way to the place where it was being held."

And Pete was telling the literal truth. He and Bill had argued, heatedly. Bill had stubbornly asserted that the Harlem Holocaust would not last four rounds with Jimmy Jenkins, the Tennessee Wildcat, while it had been the contention of Pete that in less time than that the Wildcat would be converted into a human mop for the purpose of removing the resin from the floor of the ring.

"Failing to convert him, I take it that you went inside with him," remarked Mary.

"Exactly. As a matter of loyalty, of course. So long as there seemed to be any chance I would not desert. I am not the kind, miss, who believes in faith without works."

Which was again true, for Pete had translated his faith in the Harlem Holocaust into a wager that would have left him flat had the contentions of Bill reached a confirmation. Unfortunately, the police had canceled the bet.

"And how is it that you were not arrested, as well as Mr. Marshall?"

"There was much confusion. We became separated. I found myself running; I was carried along in the rush of the crowd. Before I knew it I was in the street again. And besides"—Pete made a gesture of appeal—"it was necessary for somebody to see about obtaining bail, Miss Norcross."

"I'm sure it was very fortunate you were there," said Mary. "You seemed to understand exactly what to do."

But Pete declined to be further disconcerted. He was able to look at her without flinching this time.

"Just one more question," added Mary. "Is this Mr. Whaley whom I saw at court a particularly close friend of Mr. Marshall's?"

Pete drew a deep breath and launched upon another speech.

"It seems, miss, as nearly as I can learn, that for quite a long time the Whaley person has been known to Mr. William. I frequently took occasion—"

Mary interrupted him with a gesture.

"Never mind," she said. "I under-

stand. You labored with him on that matter, also. I have no doubt that you prayed with him and preached at him. I am sure you did everything in your power. I won't embarrass you by asking for the details. Some day I feel certain your efforts to exert a good influence over Mr. Marshall will have better success."

"Thank you, miss," and Pete bowed.

"But meantime—" And as Mary leaned forward her knuckles were tapping firmly on the arm of the chair. "Meantime, if I may make a suggestion, it would be an excellent plan for you to remain away from prize-fights."

"Yes, miss."

And it would be a very good thing for Mr. Marshall to do likewise—very good."

Pete bowed again and made a note of the fact that she had a significant way of tightly closing her lips.

"You're quite sure you understand?"

"Oh, quite—quite."

"Good night," said Mary.

Dismissal was so abrupt that there was nothing to do but accept it. And Pete was not in the least sorry to terminate the interview. In spots he had enjoyed it, but the spots had been infrequent. He was dissatisfied because he had never for an instant been master of it. Talking to Aunt Caroline was easier than talking to Bill's secretary, who did not seem to place a proper value on theology. Hang the business of being a valet, anyhow! Such were the reflections that crowded into his agile mind as he bowed himself out.

He paused on the staircase to consider the matter further. The more he thought about this interview with the social secretary the more it disturbed him. It had not been a matter of mere suggestions on her part; it was very like orders. He recognized a threat when he heard one, even though the threat might be veiled with ironical advice.

"Confound her!" muttered Pete. "That little bird is wise—too wise. I wouldn't object to her simply getting the deadwood on us, if she seemed willing to let it go at that. But she served notice on me that she might make use of it. And I believe she'd do it, if she once took it into her head.

What Samson did to the pillars of the temple isn't a marker to the house-wrecking job she can do, once she decides to get busy at it."

Up-stairs, he opened the door to Bill's apartments and thrust his head inside.

"Bill!" he called softly. "She's got the Indian sign on us."

"Come in and shut the door," growled a voice. "What did she say to you?"

Pete summarized the conversation that had taken place in the library.

"She's swinging a big stick," he said, in conclusion. "The worst of it is, she's got the goods. It isn't me alone who is supposed to stay away from prize fights. It's you."

"She can't dictate to me," declared Bill, sourly.

"Don't be too certain. She can always carry it up to the supreme court."

"Who? Aunt Caroline?" Bill considered the suggestion. "No; I don't believe it. I don't think she's mean, whatever else she may be. In fact, she told me—" He paused. It did not seem necessary to take Pete entirely into his confidence concerning conversations with his secretary. "No, Pete; I don't believe she'll say anything. That is—not this time."

"Maybe," assented Pete, pessimistically. "I don't expect she will, either. But how about the next time? Are you figuring to reform?"

Bill made a scornful gesture of denial.

"But she expects us to reform, Bill. That's where the danger comes in. And she'll be keeping her eye on us."

"Well, I guess we're as clever as she is, if it comes to that."

"That so?" remarked Pete. "Well, I'm not so sure. If you think it's going to be easy to pull wool over the eyes of this secretarial lady I want to go on record with a dissenting opinion. I'd just about as soon try to slip a fake passport over on St. Peter."

"Well, I'm not going to be threatened," declared Bill.

"Brave words, lord and master. Only it happens you *are* threatened."

Mary sat for some time in the library,

isolated with her thoughts. Occasionally she smiled. At other times she frowned. There were also brief periods when perplexity showed in her eyes. But at the last, as she went up-stairs to her room, she was smiling again.

CHAPTER IX.

"MISS NORCROSS" WIELDS A CLUB.

NELL NORCROSS—the real one—was sitting up in bed, unmistakably convalescent. She had been listening to the adventures of Mary Wayne; not all of the adventures, for Mary did not believe it was wise to subject a patient to too much excitement, yet enough to convey the idea that the introduction of Bill Marshall into society was not an affair of mere toast and tea.

"I feel," said Mary, "that at last I'm in a position to accomplish something. I feel more established than I did at the beginning."

"More influential," suggested Nell.

"Exactly. You see, I have such strong moral support from Miss Marshall."

"And from this valet you speak about," Nell reminded her.

"I'm not so sure about him. He puzzles me." There was a calculating look in Mary's eyes. "He keeps telling me that he wants to help, but I'm always doubtful as to just what he is really driving at. But he won't block me, at any rate; I'm able to take care of that."

"Then everything looks quite simple, doesn't it?"

"No, Nell; everything doesn't. That's the trouble. I'm in a strategic position, if that's what you'd call it, but I don't know how to take advantage of it."

"Then wait for an opening," advised Nell. "One is bound to come."

Mary shook her head.

"I can't afford to wait," she said. "I could wait forever, so far as Mr. Marshall is concerned, but I can see that his aunt is becoming impatient. She thinks it is time that something really began."

"What does she suggest, my dear?"

"Nothing. That's the worst of it. She

leaves it all to me. She is so confident that I know everything there is to know about such matters. She wants me to go right ahead with anything I decide upon. And if I ever express any doubt about what to do first, she begins talking about those wonderful references of mine—yours—and says that any young woman with such an experience is competent to take full charge without suggestions from anybody. And I don't know how to start, Nell, or what to do."

"She is really impressed by the references, is she?" mused Nell.

"Tremendously."

"Then it's certain you've got to make good."

"Oh, absolutely. So that's why I've come to bother you."

Nell was thoughtfully regarding a plate of white grapes that lay on her lap.

"So tell me how to start him off," said Mary.

"H-m; let's see now. I never launched a man in society," said Nell, wrinkling her nose. "I never was secretary to a man, you know. I imagine they may be more difficult than girls."

"This one is," affirmed Mary, with an emphatic nod. "He's so—so big, for one thing."

"Men are awfully awkward to handle," philosophized Nell.

"I didn't say he was awkward; you misunderstood me. I merely said he was big; he thinks he's too big for society. Of course, he isn't at all. He handles himself very well."

"Can he dance?"

"He says not. But I'm not sure."

"Why don't you try him out?"

"I'd rather not," said Mary hastily. "I don't think that's one of my duties."

"Anything is your duty that will get him into society, my dear."

"We-e-ell, possibly. But we're getting off the track, Nell. What am I to do with him?"

"Now, if he was a girl *débutante*, just being introduced, why— There! It's the very thing for him! Give him a coming-out party."

"I'm afraid he wouldn't endure it," said Mary. "He's terribly afraid of being mis-

taken for what he calls Rollo boys. If I planned a coming out party he'd probably disappear for a month. The very name would make him explode."

"Don't call it by that name," said Nell. "Don't call it any name particularly. Just have a party; at the house, of course. Invite all the nice people you can get hold of. Let's see; there ought to be some particular reason for the party. I've got it! He's about to make a tour of the world, having finished his studies at college. This gives him an opportunity to meet and entertain his friends before he starts, and also furnishes something for everybody to talk about."

Mary nodded as she listened. The idea sounded promising. But—

"Who will we invite, Nell?"

"His friends, of course."

"I'm afraid his friends are not in society," sighed Mary, as the vision of a tin ear flashed into her mind.

"Then his aunt's friends. She must know a lot of society people."

"I don't think she has kept up her acquaintances."

"That won't make a particle of difference, my dear. Miss Caroline Marshall bears a name that will get her anywhere she wants to go. And it will do as much for her nephew, too. It's a key that will open any society lock; don't worry about that. Why, you could invite people that Miss Marshall never met, and nine out of ten of them would jump at the chance. Give him a party and it can't fail."

"I really believe it can be done," said Mary thoughtfully.

"Easiest thing in the world."

"It will be a party, then. And now tell me all about the details."

But when it came to details, Nell was less satisfying. She pleaded that she was sleepy; the doctor had told her she must not talk too long. Beside, anybody could work out the details.

"The main thing is the idea," she said with a careless gesture. "I've given you that. All you have to do is to develop it. Make him help you; he'll probably have a lot of suggestions of his own."

"You haven't met him," declared Mary.

"I'd like to. He must be an extraordinary character."

"I never said so, did I?"

"No. But judging by the way you're all fussed up over this thing—"

"Bosh!" said Mary, rising. "I'm not a bit fussed. It's as easy as anything."

But all the way back to the Marshall home Mary was reflecting upon the difficulties, rather than the ease of the problem. The first thing to do was to obtain the consent of Bill Marshall. It would be no use to consult Aunt Caroline; that good lady would simply tell her to go right ahead and do exactly as she pleased. She might, of course, call upon Aunt Caroline to give Bill his orders in case he balked; but that would be a confession of her own weakness.

"I've got to persuade him myself," she decided, "even if it comes to being ruthless."

Just as she had foreseen, Bill objected strenuously and at once. He did not want a party; he was not going around the world. But if she insisted on having a lot of silly people at the house, he would start around the world before they arrived, and he would never come back. Mary argued with much patience. She even pointed out the danger that his aunt might be driven back upon the plan suggested by his valet, Peter. But Bill was in a particularly obdurate mood. Faced at last with a definite project, he quailed.

"We'll just let things drift a while," he told her.

"No," said Mary.

Bill grinned at her in an amiable way and said he thought he would go out for a ride.

"We're going to settle it," she declared.

"You promised you'd let me start."

"But I never said when."

"Well, this is the time, Mr. Marshall. We'll start now."

Bill shook his head. Mary, who faced him across the table in the sun parlor, tapped a forefinger on the writing-pad and looked him in the eye.

"Mr. Marshall," she said, "if you do not consent I shall be compelled to go to your bondsman, withdraw from your bond and advise him to surrender you to the court."

Bill gasped. He swallowed. He stared.

"And I shall do it this very afternoon," said Mary.

"It isn't fair!" he cried. "Why, you agreed—"

"I simply agreed not to say anything to your aunt," she reminded him, coldly. "And I shall not, of course. But I am entirely at liberty to go to your bondsman. If your aunt should happen to hear about it when they come to arrest you again, why that would be unfortunate. But it would be something that could not be helped."

Bill rose from his chair and leaned heavily on the table. He was red in the face and glaring, but his secretary did not even wince.

"You're threatening me!" he almost shouted.

Mary shrugged.

"It's blackmail, I tell you!"

"On the contrary, it will all be strictly according to law," said Mary with appalling calmness.

"Pete put you up to this!"

"I am not in the habit of discussing social affairs with your valet."

"Then it's Aunt Caroline."

"No. Your aunt left everything to me."

Bill began shaking a formidable finger, but the table was between them and Mary felt no immediate cause for apprehension.

"I'll never stand for it. I won't have a party. I won't be here when it happens. You're swinging a club on me. And last night I thought you were a good sport!"

"I merely intend to earn my salary," said Mary. "I make no pretensions to being a sport. I could never hope to equal—Well, we won't go into the sporting phase of it, if you please."

Bill was momentarily brought to halt. Then came another inspiration.

"Call this off and I'll double your salary," he announced.

Mary shook her head.

"That's offering me a bribe," she said.

"Beside, I believe your aunt pays my salary."

"I'll make up the difference out of my allowance."

"No, thank you."

Bill had never learned the science of deal-

ing with women. There are about 350,000,000 grown men in the world, all exactly like Bill. So, while he felt that he had been singled out as the sole victim of a Machiavellian female, in reality he had all mankind for a companion. The sheer hopelessness of his plight made him calm again.

"You admit that you're my secretary, don't you?" he asked.

Mary nodded.

"Then I'm entitled to your advice. Isn't that so?"

"Yes," answered Mary, cautiously. "I wouldn't volunteer advice, but if you ask it, that's different."

"All right; I ask it. Advise me how I can duck this party."

Mary laughed outright.

"I couldn't possibly. I can only advise you that there isn't any way in the world to duck it. And that's honest advice, Mr. Marshall."

He resumed his chair and began drawing diagrams on a sheet of paper. This occupation absorbed all his attention for several minutes. When he glanced up he was grinning helplessly.

"Some day I'll get even for this," he said, "but right now I'll admit you've got me. Go ahead, but don't rub it into me any more than you have to."

"Why, of course I won't," declared Mary heartily. "All along I've been trying to save you from getting into society another way."

Bill nodded an acknowledgment of the fact.

"What date shall it be?" she asked.

"The quicker the better. I never got warmed up standing on the edge of a swimming tank, wondering how cold the water was."

"We'll make it as early as possible, then. Do you think it ought to be a large party?"

"No!"

"Neither do I," agreed Mary. "But it ought to be exclusive—very exclusive."

"Are you reminding me of something?"

"No," laughed Mary. "I wasn't thinking of that. Now, about the invitations: do you think they should be engraved, or would it be a little better to write personal notes to everybody?"

"That's your end of the job. How do I know?"

"I think perhaps I'd better consult one or two of the fashionable stationers," said Mary. "I want to find out just what they're doing this season."

Bill looked at his watch.

"All right; let's go and see the stationers now."

"It's almost lunch-time, isn't it?"

"Almost. That's why I want to go and see the stationers."

"Oh," said Mary.

"Come along. You owe me something after what you've done."

She smiled at that, although she was not quite certain whether she ought to go. Still, he had really surrendered, and she felt rather grateful to him.

"All right; I'll get my hat," she said.

Five minutes later they were moving up Fifth Avenue in Bill's car.

"Would you honestly have turned me over to the bondsman?" he asked suddenly.

"Let's talk about stationery," she reminded him. "I suppose for a man it ought to be plain white."

Bill turned to study her and bumped fenders with a taxicab.

"Pink," he declared.

"Pink! For a man?"

"Pink, with little freckles on it," he said, taking another look.

Mary lifted her chin and watched the traffic. Presently he turned into a side street and ran on for half a block.

"Anyhow, here's where we take lunch," he announced.

CHAPTER X.

THE LEOPARD'S SPOTS.

PETE hitched the largest chair forward, lifted a foot to the top of Bill's writing-table, crossed the other upon it and glared sourly at the wall in front of him.

"You'll get to like it yet," he predicted.

"Bull!" observed Bill. "I'm a leopard. I can't change 'em."

"You can have 'em changed for you, all right. Many a good leopard has been skinned, Bill."

"What are you bee'ing about? You're responsible for getting me in on this more than anybody else."

"Oh, go ahead; lay off on me. It's a grand joke because you see I'm down. Where do I come in?"

"Where does anybody's valet come in?" countered Bill, as he stropped a razor.

"You said it. That's just the point. You're copping all the cream. I'm a servant; that's all. It isn't neighborly, Bill. Gosh hang it, it isn't democracy! Do you call it a square deal, sneaking her off to a lunch?"

"That was business, Pete. We had to look at stationery. Beside, don't I give you my evenings?"

"Is it right that I eat in the servants' dining-room? Is it right that I sleep in the servants' quarters? Me—your guest! Is that a way to treat a guy who passed your college exams for you? And *she* thinks I'm a servant, too. I'll leave it to you if it's right."

"But Aunt Caroline puts you in a class by yourself," observed Bill. "Aunt Caroline doesn't misjudge you, Pete, even if you do claim to be a valet."

Pete allocated Aunt Caroline according to his idea of where she would do the most good.

"But *she* treats me as if I was somebody to take orders from her," he grumbled on. "She's losing her respect for me."

"Oh, forget Miss Norcross."

"What? Forget Gray Eyes? Forget little Nell? Why don't you try it yourself, Bill?"

"I don't have to. She's my secretary," said Bill maliciously.

"She's your dancing-teacher, you mean. I've seen you at it; the two of you. Getting ready for the party! Bill Marshall, you're losing your character and your self-respect."

Bill grinned complacently.

"It isn't as if you needed to learn to dance," added Pete, as he kicked a book off the table. "You can dance rings around her, if you want to. But you're deceitful, Bill. She's got you one-twoing and three-fouring all over the library, and you making believe it's all new stuff. It's a gol darned shame, and I'm going to tell her so."

"You're going to mind your own business or get busted," predicted Bill. "It doesn't make any difference what I used to know about dancing; I need practise. Besides, you can always go and talk theology to Aunt Caroline. She's never busy."

Pete groaned.

"I'm laying off it—when she'll let me," he said miserably. "She's getting interested in it, Bill. Yesterday I had to go and bone up some more in the encyclopedia; I was all run out of stuff."

"All right, son; only don't accuse me."

Pete subsided into silence and Bill shaved. The young man who would be a valet was not enjoying a happy morning. Part of it was because of the night before, but some of the unhappiness lay rooted in the fact that Bill's secretary persisted in taking him at face value. At the same time Pete was convinced that she knew better; that there was a mocking deliberation in the way that she held him to his bargain.

"Confound it, Bill! That girl's no fool."

"I said it first," Bill reminded him. "I said it days ago."

"She knows darn well I'm something more than a valet."

"She never said it to me, Pete; never even hinted at it. I don't believe she even suspects."

"Bill, that's an insult. If you say she doesn't even suspect, I'll poison you. Why, any girl with good sense would suspect. Do I look like a valet?"

"Sure."

Bill had finished shaving, so it was easy enough to dodge the book.

There had been a good deal of talk like that ever since the party became a fixed project. Pete Stearns was discovering that the business of flinging gibes had become less profitable; either Bill's hide was getting thicker or his perceptions were becoming dulled. It was no longer possible always to get a rise; sometimes it shocked him to find that he was rising himself. And then there was that secretary; she had annoying moments of superiority. She was in a fair way to become a snob, thought Pete, and just because she could not recognize the difference between a real social gulf and one that was self-imposed. Some day he was

going to cross that gulf in a wild leap and make her feel silly.

"Where you going now?" he demanded, as Bill made for the door.

"Business, old dear. Cheer up."

Bill's business was in the office on the second floor. It, or she—or both—had been making a good many demands on his time. He bore them with a fortitude that made him proud of himself.

"Good morning," said Mary, looking up. "Any more names to suggest?"

"Haven't we dug up enough?"

"We should have a margin to allow for declinations. There are bound to be a few, you know. Even some of the people who accept don't come."

"I don't think of anybody else," said Bill. "You've got a whole lot of people now that I never saw or heard of."

"I'm quite proud of the list," she said. "Some of it is really distinguished. And—Oh, by the way, Mr. Marshall. Your aunt gave me another name; you must know him, of course. Bishop Wrangell."

"What! That old dodo?"

"He's a bishop; a very old friend of your aunt's. And bishops are very exclusive. I think it's fine to have a bishop."

"He's a dodo," reaffirmed Bill. "He'll crab it all. Cut him off."

"But I've already invited him," said Mary. "It's in the mail."

"He'll talk everybody to death," groaned Bill. "I know him; he's been here to dinner. It's a curse to have a party, but bishops are damnation."

"You surprise me," observed Mary. (He did not.)

"But you don't know this bird and I do. He's so dry that the dust flies out of him when he talks."

"Well, I'm sorry; but it's done. I couldn't very well refuse your aunt."

"Oh, I suppose so. Just because he's a bishop Aunt Caroline thinks he's going to put her on the free-list when she hits heaven. A bishop! What are we going to have at this party? Prayers?"

Mary bent over her work until she was sure that she had command of herself.

"Say!" exclaimed Bill. "I know a stunt. Would it be all right to invite my valet?"

"No; I should think not," answered Mary. "You mean as a guest? Why in the world do you want him?"

"He could entertain the bishop. We could make that his special job. Come on; let's do it."

Mary smiled, but shook her head decisively.

"Your guests would never forgive you if they discovered that you had invited your valet. You see, such things are not done."

She had slipped into the employment of that little phrase until it came to her lips as a reason for almost any prohibition that dealt with the social code.

"But I want to do it as a special favor to Pete," urged Bill.

"Or as a special penance, perhaps," said Mary, with a wise look. "No; and besides, your valet will doubtless have his duties that evening. He'll be needed in the gentlemen's dressing-room."

Bill picked up a morning paper and turned to the sporting page. Suddenly he looked up.

"Say, if you can squeeze a bishop in at this stage of the game I ought to be entitled to invite somebody else, hadn't I?"

"Of course. I asked for suggestions."

"Well, I want to invite a very, very good friend of mine."

"Who?" asked Mary cautiously.

"He's an Italian."

She raised her eyebrows and wrinkled her forehead into an inquiry.

"An artist," added Bill.

"Oh! Now that sounds promising."

"A wop artist. His name is Valentino."

"Why, of course we've got room for him," she said. "I think it's a splendid idea, Mr. Marshall. I hadn't any notion that you had friends in the art world. I'm very much interested in art myself. What does he paint?"

"He's a sculptor," said Bill.

"Better yet. That's even more distinguished. He must have the true temperament."

"Oh, barrels of it."

"An impressionist or a realist?"

Bill considered.

"I'd say he was a little of both. He's very strong on impressions, but he produces

them in a realistic way, if you can get what I mean."

"His work has strength," commented Mary, with a nod of understanding.

"You've got it. That's exactly it, Miss Norcross. He's young, but he's already made a name for himself. He makes a specialty of working on heads and husts."

"His full name?" inquired Mary.

"Antonio Valentino."

"Oh, I like it!" she exclaimed. "He's the only artist we'll have. Perhaps another time we can get him to bring his friends. What is the address, please?"

"He has a studio over on the East Side. Wait a second."

Bill searched a pocket and discovered a memorandum of the address.

"And when you write," he advised, "don't address it to 'Mister.' Make it 'Signor.' He's accustomed to that and it'll please him."

"Signor Antonio Valentino," said Mary, reading from her list. "Quite the most distinguished name at the party, Mr. Marshall. That's the best suggestion you've made yet."

Bill smiled as though he had done a full morning's work.

"And now, if you've nothing more for the present, I have errands to do," she announced. "Will you excuse me?"

"Don't I get another dancing lesson? I thought you said—"

Mary shook her head as she gathered up some papers.

"I've been thinking about your dancing," she said. "And I've come to the conclusion, Mr. Marshall, that there isn't anything more I can teach you. You've done so well that sometimes I suspect—"

That seemed a good place to end the sentence and she walked out of the room, leaving Bill to wonder whether Pete had not already played him false.

On her way out Mary remembered that she wanted to speak to Aunt Caroline about the florist, but at the threshold of the library she paused. Aunt Caroline was engaged.

"I wish you'd continue where you left off yesterday," she was saying.

"About what, madam?" It was the voice of the valet.

"Why, it was about theology."

"Ah, yes. But you see there are so many kinds. Do you remember just which we were discussing? Speculative, philosophical, practical or dogmatic?"

"Mercy, Peter; how should I know? But it was interesting, so please go on."

"Very good, madam. I think we might go into the catechetical school for a bit, and that will lead us up to the doctrine of penal substitution."

"Splendid!" said Aunt Caroline.

Mary tiptoed down the hall, holding a gloved hand tightly over her lips. When she reached the street she let the laugh have its way.

"Now what do you know about that?" she murmured. And Mary was not an adept in the use of slang.

Some hours later she was discussing final preparations with Nell Norcross, who had convalesced to the point where she was sitting up in a chair and taking a vivid interest in everything that concerned the social fortunes of Bill Marshall, *débutant*.

"And now I have a surprise for you," said Mary. "You're coming to the party yourself!"

"I?" exclaimed Nell.

"You're quite well enough, and I'll need your help, my dear. I'm counting on you."

"But, Mary—oh, I can't."

"Nonsense. I've spoken to Miss Marshall about it. I explained I had a friend who had also done secretarial work and who really knew a great deal more about it than I do, and she said by all means to bring you. There won't really be anything for you to do, but you'll just be there in case we need some expert advice."

"I don't believe I'm strong enough," demurred Nell.

"Yes, you are. I asked the doctor. He said it would do you good."

"But I haven't a dress, Mary."

"Yes, you have. I've ordered one—one for you and one for me. They're with the compliments of Miss Marshall, they're perfect dreams and we're the luckiest people alive."

"You're a conspirator," complained Nell.

"Honestly, Mary, I don't think I ought to go. I'm sure I shouldn't."

4 A-S

One of those determined looks flashed into Mary's face.

"Nell Norcross, you've got to go. I won't let you stay away. It's time you did something. Here I've been skating along on thin ice, bluffing and pretending and telling fibs until I hardly know which is my real name—yours or mine. Now I've reached the very climax and you've got to see me through. I'm going to be adamant."

Nell sighed.

"You're a whole lot bossier than you were the day I met you in the Brain Workers' Exchange," she said petulantly.

"Don't ever mention that place," and Mary made a grimace. "It gives me crawly little chills."

"Will I have to bring any more references?"

"No, you silly thing. References, indeed! Why, Nell, you won't go to this party on references. You'll go on my reputation!"

"Mary Wayne, I'm in awe of you."

Mary laughed.

"You wouldn't be if you knew how much I feel like a charlatan. It's all on the outside, Nell. I am just hollow emptiness; the shell is the only thing that holds me together."

Nell made a gesture of reluctant assent.

"I'll go if you'll let me meet the Italian sculptor," she said. "I adore sculptors."

"You can meet the sculptor and the bishop both," promised Mary. "And if you're very good I'll let you meet the valet."

"But not, of course, Mr. Marshall."

"Pooh! That's nothing exciting. Anybody can meet him, my dear."

"Mary," said Nell, "inside of the Marshall house you may be a marvelous liar, but outside of it your work is really very poor."

CHAPTER XI.

THE VALET IN THE HOUSE.

A SMALL, thin girl with large, vivid eyes, a blue dress and collar-bones, who was zooming up-stairs two steps at a time, ran head on into Bill, who was coming slowly down. Her head struck

him at the waist line and Bill sat down on a step. She immediately sat beside him.

"Isn't this the funniest party!" she exclaimed. "Did I hurt you?"

"It is and you didn't," answered Bill.

He had never seen her before.

"I haven't seen a soul I know, except mother, who brought me here."

"Neither have I," said Bill, glancing down-stairs at the crush.

"Heaven knows why they invited us. Mother says that father used to know somebody in the family years and years ago. She says they're really all right, too. We just came because things have been so terribly dull in town that we've been sitting home screaming. Do you ever feel like screaming?"

"Right now."

"Go ahead," she advised. "I'm sure it will be all right. Anyhow, we came. They have perfectly lovely things to eat. And the house is so beautiful. But it's funny, just the same. Did you know there was a bishop here?"

"I heard so."

"There is; he shook hands with me. He was so solemn; it seemed like shaking hands with God. And there are piles of middle-aged people here, aren't there? I don't mean there aren't any young ones, for of course there are—just millions. But there are more middle-aged ones. Still, the music is just wonderful. Who is the queer old lady who wears the little cap?"

"I believe she lives here," said Bill.

"Well, she's perfectly dear. She patted me on the head and asked me if I was Henry Kingsley's little girl. I told her I was; I didn't want to disappoint her. But I'm not; I'm Arnold Gibbs's little girl. And—somebody else's."

She chirped her way through the conversation like a voluble bird.

"Engaged," she added, holding up a finger. "But he's not here, so it's all right for me to sit on the stairs with you. Here's something else that's funny: I haven't met the man they're giving the party for. Isn't that a scream? Somehow, we got in late, or something or other. He's awfully high-brow: oh, yes, I heard that the first thing. You're not highbrow, are you?"

Bill shook his head.

"It's comfortable to know you're not," she said. "Whenever I meet an intellect I make a holy show of myself. Did you know that he's sailing for Australia to-morrow? Uhuh! He's going there to study something or other. They told me that down-stairs, too. Let's see; what is it he's going to study? Crustaceans! That's it. What are they? Negroes?"

"I'm not up on them," said Bill. "Maybe."

"Anyhow, he's going to study them. And then he's going to write volumes and volumes about them. He's a scientist. Isn't it funny to be at a scientific party? And—oh, yes; it seems there's been an affair in his life. He's going away to bury his heart while he's studying the thingamajigs. Did you ever hear of anything so romantic?"

Bill turned his head for a better survey of the young person with the astonishing information.

"Where did you pick up all the info?" he inquired, as carelessly as he could.

"From a young man who knows all about him," answered Arnold Gibbs's little girl.

"What sort of a young man?"

"Oh, a nice one. He's kind of thin and pale and he has baby-stare eyes."

"Does he have funny wrinkles at the corners of them when he laughs?" asked Bill.

"That's exactly what he has!" she exclaimed. "How beautifully you describe. Are you a detective? They have them at parties, you know."

"No; I'm not a detective. I—er—just happen to know him, I think."

Bill wiped his forehead with a handkerchief and stared straight ahead.

"Where did you meet him?" he asked, after a pause.

"Oh, down-stairs. You can meet anybody at a party, you know. It's perfectly all right. If people weren't perfectly all right they wouldn't be invited. He dances beautifully."

"You mean to say—"

"Twice. We danced out in the conservatory. It seems he's bashful; he wouldn't go into the big room for fear he'd bump me

into people or step on their feet. He isn't sure of himself. But I don't see why, because he dances excruciatingly well. But he wouldn't believe I was engaged, so I had to run away from him."

"I don't quite get that."

"Kissed me," she sighed. "Oh, well, a party's a party. But I wouldn't let him do it again."

"Would you like to have me lick him?" asked Bill, his voice slightly trembling.

"Lick him? What in the world for? Because he didn't know? Why, what a queer person you are!"

Bill felt that he was, indeed, a very queer person. He was the owner of a party at which his valet had danced twice with one of his guests and kissed her as an additional token of democracy! He did not know whether to rage or laugh. But—oh, if Aunt Caroline ever heard of it! Or his secretary!

"Perhaps you'd like to dance with me," she added.

Bill was startled. But he mumbled an affirmative.

"Let's go, then," and she trotted downstairs ahead of him, as eager as a kitten chasing a paper ball.

In the lower hall Bill felt a touch on his arm and turned to face Mary Wayne.

"May I interrupt just a moment?" she asked. Then to the girl: "I know you'll excuse me. I won't keep Mr. Marshall a minute."

The small one in the blue dress gave a frightened stare at Bill, shrieked and fled into the crowd.

"Have I offended her?" asked Mary, anxiously. "I'm sorry. I don't seem to place her, although I've been trying to remember all the guests."

"That's Arnold Gibbs's little girl," explained Bill. "She's been telling me things about my party and now she's just discovered who I am."

"Oh! And you let the poor child go on and on, of course. How awfully mean of you. Will you never learn?" Mary frowned at him with all the severity of a sister. "But that's not what I wanted to speak to you about. You've been hiding—and you mustn't! People are asking where you are. Please—please don't spoil things. It's your

party and you've just got to be present at it."

Bill made a face.

"I'm tired of being exhibited," he growled. "I'm tired of meeting people who say: 'So this is little Willie Marshall. Mercy, how you've grown! I haven't seen you since you wore knickerbockers. But you're a Marshall, sure enough; you're the image of your father.' I tell you, I'm sick of it!"

"But it's only for once," pleaded Mary. "Now they've met you they won't do it again. But what I want you to do now is to go in and dance with some of the young people. There are some lovely girls in there, and they're just sitting around. Come; I'll introduce you, if you haven't already met them."

But Bill hung back. He did not want to dance at all; he was grateful because his secretary had inadvertently saved him from Arnold Gibbs's little girl. There was wo in his eyes as he looked at Mary. There was every sound reason why his expression should have been different, for Mary, in her party gown from Aunt Caroline, inspired anything but wo. Even she herself was conscious of the fact that she looked nice. Bill was becoming slowly conscious of it himself, although he could not drive the gloom out of his soul.

"Come," she said, peremptorily, hooking her arm in his.

"I'll dance with you," he offered.

"That won't do at all. I'm not a guest."

"If I can't dance with you I won't dance with anybody."

She shook her head impatiently.

"Please be sensible, Mr. Marshall."

"You first," declared Bill stubbornly.

"No! It's not the thing for you to do at all. Perhaps later; but—"

"We'll go out in the conservatory and dance."

"But nobody is dancing out there."

"Come on, then."

Bill started, with her arm prisoned in a grip that forbid escape.

"Well, if I dance with you," said Mary, as she was dragged along, "then afterward you must promise to—"

"Maybe."

They stood at the entrance to the conservatory, Mary still scolding in an undertone. Suddenly she pinched his arm violently and pointed. An animated couple were swinging into view from behind a thatch of palms. His valet—and Arnold Gibbs's little girl!

"Oh, Heavens!" said Mary.

She fled, with Bill trailing in her wake.

Even at that, it was not a bad party. It was somewhat overwhelmed with descendants, it is true; descendants of relatives and of old friends and of persons who were intimates of Bill Marshall's grandfather. But some of the descendants were young and were managing to have a good time. Aunt Caroline had her own circle, a sort of little backwater, into which descendants eddied and tarried a bit, and from which they eddied out again. In fact, Aunt Caroline had a party within a party. Her permanent guest seemed to be the bishop; once caught in the backwater he never escaped into the stream. He stayed there with Aunt Caroline, while the descendants whirled gently around them. But the bishop was amiable in his dusty way, while his dignity was unimpeachable. He had made an impression on Arnold Gibbs's little girl, and what more could any bishop do?

Nell Norcross, known to the household and its guests as "Miss Wayne," did not prove to be such a reliance as Mary hoped. Perhaps it was because she was a convalescent and did not feel equal to the ordeal of plunging boldly into affairs; perhaps it was due to a natural diffidence among strangers. But whatever it was, Mary discovered that she was almost wholly upon her own resources; that Nell was not rising capably to the emergency; that she edged off into the middle distance or the background with irritating persistence; that, in short, Nell, with all her wealth of experience and all her highly attested worth as an expert, was unable to adapt herself to the situation so well as the amateur secretary. Nell even admitted this shortcoming to Mary.

"I feel strange because I'm being called by your name," she offered as an explanation."

"Mercy!" said Mary. "How about me?"

"But you've become accustomed to it, my dear. Never mind; I'm sure I'll brighten up as soon as the sculptor comes."

"There! I'd forgotten him. Oh, I hope he doesn't fail. I must find Mr. Marshall and ask him if he's heard anything. Have you seen him? I'll hunt around for him. I suppose he's trying to hibernate again."

And once more Mary started on the trail of Bill Marshall, for the double purpose of dragging him back into society and inquiring as to the whereabouts of the *signor* from Italy.

Pete Stearns was in purgatory. He had been sent for by Aunt Caroline, discovered by a servant and haled to the backwater, into which he was irresistibly sucked.

"Bishop," said Aunt Caroline, "this is the young man of whom I spoke."

The bishop took Pete's hand, pressed it gently and retained it.

"My young friend," he said, "you are on the threshold of a career that offers you priceless opportunities. Have you looked well into your heart? Do you find yourself ready to dedicate your whole life to the work?"

"Sir," replied Pete, with a shake in his voice, "it is my ambition to become nothing less than a bishop."

"There! I told you so," said Aunt Caroline.

"Have you a sound theological foundation?" asked the bishop, still holding Pete's hand.

"I should say he had!" exclaimed Aunt Caroline. "What was it you were telling me about yesterday, Peter? The cat—cat—"

"The catechetical lectures of Cyril of Jerusalem," said Pete smoothly. "From that we go on to the doctrines of Arius of Antioch."

"That would be going backward," commented the bishop.

"Huh? Oh, certainly, sir; strictly speaking. But we have been skipping around a bit, if I may say it, sir. Hitting the high—that is, sir, taking up such matters as interest us. Theistic philosophy, ethical rationalism. Harnack's conception of monophysiticism, Gregory of Nyssa, Anselm of Canterbury—"

"Who wrote the 'Canterbury Tales,' " interrupted Aunt Caroline. "Wasn't that what you told me, Peter?"

But Peter was hurrying on.

"Miss Marshall has been good enough, sir, to show some small interest in my work; it has been a great encouragement to me. I may say that in the field of philosophical and speculative theology—"

"Stick to the dogmatic, my friend," advised the bishop—"the dogmatic and the special dogmatic. Be sound, whatever you are. Now, here is a test I apply to every young man; it shows the trend of his thought, it tells me whether he has embarked upon the proper course: give me, my young friend, an outline of your views on diophysite orthodoxy."

Pete coughed and lifted his glance to the ceiling.

"Confound the old coot!" he was telling himself. "He has me out on a limb. What will I do? How in—"

And then—rescue! A small person in a blue dress floated into the backwater.

"Oh, here's my nice man," she said, as she possessed herself of Pete's arm. "Bishop, let go of his hand. He's going to teach me that new vamp thing. Hurry, teacher; the music started ages ago."

And as Pete was towed out of the backwater by Arnold Gibbs's little girl the bishop and Aunt Caroline stared after him.

"I greatly fear," observed the bishop, "that our young friend is somewhat in the grip of predestinarianism."

"Bishop, you frighten me," said Aunt Caroline. "But I'll take it up with him in the morning."

When another partner had invaded the conservatory and claimed the little girl in the blue dress, Pete Stearns sighed.

"There goes the only one who doesn't suspect me," he said. "The only real little democrat in the place. Although it's only ignorance in her case, of course. Oh, well, it's not so bad; I'm doing better than Bill at that."

Somebody tapped him on the arm.

"I've been waiting for an opportunity," said Nell Norcross. "I do not wish to

make a scene. But I understand that you are Mr. Marshall's valet. Is that correct?"

Pete looked her in the eye and speculated.

"I think I am not mistaken," said Nell, after she had waited sufficiently for an answer. "May I ask, then, if it is customary for valets to dance with the guests of their employers?"

"Madam," said Pete, "may I in turn ask by what authority you question me?"

"There is nothing mysterious about my position in this house," replied Nell. "I am here as an assistant to Miss—Norcross." It was annoying to stumble over the name. "Miss Marshall understands perfectly; I am here at her request. I think you will do a very wise thing if you retire to the gentlemen's dressing-room and remain there. Am I clear?"

It was Pete's first glimpse at close hand of the social secretary's aide. It did not bore him in the least. He might have described her pallor as "interesting," had he been prone to commonplaces. Her eyes, he thought, were even better than those of Arnold Gibbs's little girl; they were not so vivid, perhaps, yet more deeply luminous.

"Let us debate this matter," he said. "Will you sit down?"

"Certainly not!"

"Aw, let's."

He spoke with a disarming persuasion, but Nell refused to be seated.

"Will you go up-stairs at once?" she demanded.

Pete placed a finger against his lips and glanced from side to side. "Suppose," he said, "I were to tell you a great secret?"

"Go at once!"

"Suppose we exchange secrets?" he whispered.

That startled her. What did he mean? Did he know anything—or suspect?

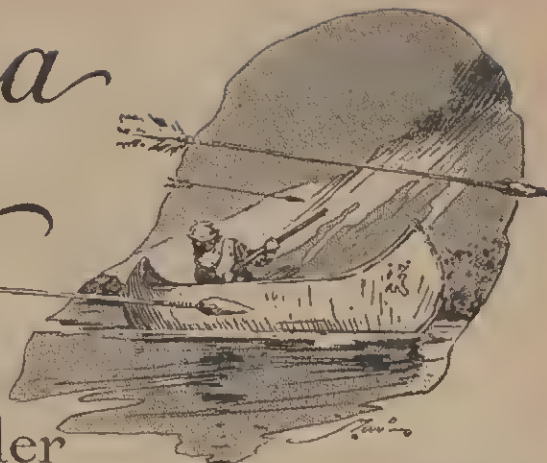
"Suppose—" He stopped, turned his head slightly and listened. "Something is happening," he said. "Let's run."

And before Nell Norcross knew it she was running, her hand in his, for all the world like *Alice* in the Looking Glass Country dashing breathlessly along, with the *Red Queen* shouting: "Faster! Faster!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

Virginia Dare

by Warren H. Miller



IN this historical story the author—who has made a careful study of the subject—gives a plausible and romantic explanation of the fate of the colony sent, in 1587, by Sir Walter Raleigh, to found an agricultural State in Virginia. Virginia Dare, the heroine of Mr. Miller's story, and the first white child born of English parents in America, came into the world in August, 1587. Her grandfather, John White, the governor of the colony, sailed for England a few days after her birth. When he returned to Virginia a year later the colonists had disappeared; the only trace of their destination being the word "Croatan"—a place supposed to belong to a friendly tribe of Indians—carved on the trunk of a tree. There was no sign of a massacre, and it was supposed that the colonists had gone willingly. Historians have traced the colony to the present site of the Croatan Reservation, but the exact fate of the lost colony remains a fascinating mystery of early American history. This story makes no pretense of being more than fiction; yet good history and good historical fiction often are much the same thing. Perhaps the solution of the mystery offered by Mr. Miller is the correct one.

"**V**IRGINIA," said John Sampson, pleadingly.

Virginia sat on the river bank, her bare feet dabbling in the water, her eyes lost in the reverie as she stared across at the thick ranks of bottle-trunked ashes, gums and cypress that fringed the swampy shores as far as the eye could reach.

"Virginia."

Virginia awoke from her reflections with a start, and turned to face him inquiringly. John Sampson seemed particularly insistent, this golden October evening of 1610!

"What wilt thou, John?" she asked, and there was a note of impatience in her voice that might well have bid Sampson beware.

"Virginia," he trembled, "once again—wilt thou not harken to my suit—"

He got no further. Virginia turned about with a shrug of disdain, kicking fiercely at a small frog who was resting with paws on an outlying rootlet.

"Nay, and I would not have a thousand such!" she sneered, bitterly. "Wert not thou a boy at Roanoke, when we moved to this land of savages, and yet hast no longing, no urge to see aught of thine own people again? La, we do sink to the level of swine, here, while the great world doth go about his mighty affairs—and we lie here and—rot!"

"Have we not twice essayed to have speech with those at Jamestown, but thou knowest that, e'en though the Tuscaroras and the Chowans are friendly, Powhatan's folk did turn us back—as he hath those sent out by Captain John Smith to seek us."

"Pish! And had not one of ye all the woodcraft to steal through!" taunted Virginia. "Would that I were a man! Of what avail to carve crosses and letters on trees? It did but bring down the massacre of Opecanough, the head chieftain of Pow-

hatan, upon us! Of us all, but Henry Berry and William Cooper, and thou and I—mere children—did escape from the Chowan country—”

“Yea, and right glad was I to get back under Manteo’s protection!” retorted Sampson. “Better to live in peace here and raise crops than to be slain of wounds dealt us by hostile savages. The Croatans say that the Jamestowne folk fare wretchedly, always at war with the Pamunkeys, always lacking corn and meat.”

“Yet would I go!” sighed Virginia. “It was twenty years since I was taken from Roanoke, a baby. My grandfather, John White, is God knoweth where, perhaps at Jamestown, seeking for us. My mother hath long since passed away, and Ananias Dare doth age and grow feeble—while the rest of ye are but little better than savages!

“Fie! He that doth ask my hand shall first lead me out of this land and take ship to England! I will not marry, with no rites of church or priest—to raise potatoes and squashes like a squaw!”

Again she shrugged her shoulders and stared fixedly into the swirling waters of the noble river that is now called the Lumbee. Sampson withdrew, crestfallen.

Aside from his buckskin clothes, there was little to distinguish him from the Croatan braves who were his fellows. He walked out of the little glade, joining a young buck who loitered in the background. The latter was smooth shaven, except for a crest of hair that parted his skull, and was naked hut for an apron of coarse cotton cloth. He was a dandy, highly-painted and tattooed, and his arm and calf muscles were ornamented with beaded girdles from which dangled long tassels of human hair.

Both young men wore bows over their shoulders and quivers of arrows at their thighs, and, putting an arm over the Indian’s shoulder, Sampson left the glade, leaving Virginia to her discontent.

Her eye roved up-stream, to the end of the long reach where a huge cypress grew out of the center of the stream, its branches towering a hundred and fifty feet above the water, its great swollen bowl fifteen feet in diameter where the stream laved around its mossy circumference. A century later these

trees were to be called “dram” trees by the North Carolina settlers, for in passing them on their log rafts it was the custom to take a dram of rum all around by way of celebration.

This particular tree bore the Great Totem of the Croatans, and was the landmark dividing their territory from the Cherokees to the west. Not in twenty years, since Manteo, the chief who was baptized on Roanoke, came to be head sachem of the Croatans, had it ever been passed by hostile parties from either tribe, so benign and just had been his rule.

Virginia watched it with longing heart. To her it was but another prison bar, another landmark of the girdle of savagery that ringed about the Lost Colony of Roanoke.

“La, but were the Cherokees only friendly to us whites!” she sighed, “one might pass through their hill country and so come around the Pamunkeys of Powhatan to Jamestown—and then a ship home! Would that I were a man!” she again exclaimed, the longing to do and dare surging up in her soul.

Then she sprang to her feet in excitement, for, from up-stream came the dull, muffled *boom!* that could be heard from no other piece than a matchlock! She knew all about matchlocks; her father had one, brought away from Roanoke, and, though the remnants of the colony preferred bows and arrows for hunting, they still kept the pieces and the precious powder for them.

As she watched, a small dugout shot around a big tree, and her eyes caught the flash of sunlight on armor. A lone human was paddling it for dear life, looking back over his shoulder as he fled. Then a long war-canoe filled with Cherokees shot past the tree, and its crew, tossing up their paddles with rage, abandoned the chase and put the canoe around.

Virginia danced with excitement. A man! A white man! After twenty years! She clapped her hands with joy and whooped shrilly, her eyes feasting on him.

The paddler drew nearer. His stroke seemed to be toilsome, desperate, and she could now note an arrow sticking from his shoulder. Then he collapsed and fell for-

ward into the canoe, and the dugout drifted aimlessly down on the broad bosom of the river.

On the rapid sweep of the tide, it would not be ten minutes before it would drift on down-stream and be gone, perhaps forever. There was no time to run back to the high ground and get the braves from the villiage, so Virginia hesitated not a minute but plunged in, her heavily-decorated buckskin skirt surging its bright beads and porcupine embroidery in waving lines as she struck out to intercept the canoe.

She met it in mid-stream, crooked a brown, tanned arm over its gunwale and turned it slantwise to the stream, where the current would edge it across. Finally, a half mile below the landing, she managed to grasp the trunk of a water-ash growing a little further out from his fellows and so pulled the canoe in among the trees, where her feet could touch bottom.

Then she got into the canoe and seized the paddle. The man lay face downward in the bottom, with a pool of bloody water swashing around him. The arrow stuck out from his left shoulder, just above the arm-pit curve of his cuirasse, and both it and his steel hauberk were dented and nicked with the white quartz scratches of Cherokee arrowheads. A drawn rapier, and the matchlock rolled about unheeded in the round bottom of the dugout: all the evidences of a stern fight marked the canoe, feathered as it was with arrow shafts and the cuts of quartz tomahawks of the defeated Indians.

Virginia paddled swiftly back to the landing, her heart throbbing, the tears pringling in her eyes. This man moved her strongly, and still more so the thought that he might die with never a word to them from the outside world.

She raised a shrill war-whoop as she drove the dugout up the mud banks of the low river bluff that formed the canoe haven for her villiage. Braves and settlers came running down in a mixed body, eager questions on their lips.

"Faith! Virginia, and what hast thou there?" exclaimed Henry Berry, his blue eyes staring out of his bearded face. "God! 'Tis a white man—see to the

armor, and the matchlock, and the sword! 'Tis a gentleman, I trow, by the latter!"

They lifted him out, and laid him gently on the bank. The man coughed and gasped, and then his eyes opened. They were full of suffering, but a look of pleasure, mixed with perplexity, began to dawn in them as they looked up at the faces surrounding him.

"Nay—'tis but a scratch—a touch!" he gasped. "Have a care with mine armor!" as they gently unbuckled the cuirasse. Again he studied their faces.

"Ye be odd savages!" he murmured, feebly, looking into the blue and brown eyes around him. "Tell me—ye are—ye must be—them of Roanoke?" he questioned, his voice thrilling with eagerness.

"We be!" returned Berry. "Oh, fair sir—"

"Ah-h!" sighed the stranger, bappily, and his eyes closed again as he sank back.

"God rest you, merry gentleman!" said Berry solemnly. "He will speak again, in time—have a care, my masters."

An Indian deftly removed the arrow, and a compress of cotton wool was put over the wound. Then a stretcher was improvised, and they bore him up to the village.

"To my house!" directed Virginia, jealously. "He is mine! I found him!"

"Where better than to the house of Ananias Dare?" quoth Berry, agreeing with her. An old man came to the door of one of the few log huts in the villiage as the bearers proceeded.

"How now, wench?" he demanded.

"Oh, fayther! 'Tis wonderful!" cried Virginia. "We have a white man—"

"A *white* man!" croaked Dare. "Where! Whence came he? Let me have speech with him—"

"Nay, fayther, he is sore wounded, and—sleepeth," she added glancing at the tranquil face of the stranger. "He shall bide with us, if it please you, sir."

"Aye, marry," nodded Dare, "bring him within."

II.

As Virginia watched by the cot of the sleeper, it seemed to her that she had never beheld so handsome a man. The stamp of

aristocracy marked his features with regularity of outline, and breathed through the sterner characteristics set on them by a lifetime at the wars.

The broad, high forehead, the heavy arched eyebrows, the straight, regular nose surmounting a pair of straight bristling mustaches, the soft, full beard, and a wide sweep of curly hair over his ears—all were of the gentlemen of note of his period. The wide linen collar that should lie over the collet of his cuirasse was wanting, however, and his clothes, though cut after the London fashion, Virginia noted with some curiosity, were of buckskin, and Indian stitched.

The man half awoke, at intervals, during Virginia's vigil, to bog for water, but by midnight he sank into a profound slumber and did not stir again. Virginia awoke at dawn, from a fitful sleep in her chair, to find the stranger's brown eyes fastened upon her. Instantly they danced with a quizzical, humorous light and his lips curled in a gay smile.

"Prithee, maiden—how came I here?" he asked, glancing curiously around the room. His eye fell on his sword and matchlock, standing in the corner. "Aye, 'twas a stern fight—cut—thrust—and fire mine arquebus, all the way down—"

"Tush! Thou must not talk and excite thyself," reproved Virginia, "lest a fever come upon thee of thy wound."

"Nay; 'tis naught," laughed the stranger lightly. "'Twas lucky the savages did not wound me in my sword arm. This, in the left shoulder, was but a scratch. Tell me, what befell after I did pass the great tree?"

Virginia gave an account of how she swam out and rescued him. "And now, tell me, fair sir," she concluded, admiration glowing openly in her eyes, "art thou that great Captain John Smith, of Jamestown, concerning whom we hear much?"

"Nay—nay!" exclaimed the stranger, hastily. "Not that bag of bombast—in good sooth! I am William Bruster, gentleman, of Sir Walter Raleigh's train. I did wager him five thousand pounds—and 'tis posted in the Star and Garter coffee-house in London town—that I would find his Lost Colony for him, for Sir Walter hath spent

much moneys and sent many knaves and runagates to seek ye, none of whom did aught but get slain by the savages or come back with some woful tale of hardship.

"Besides, I seek a little lady, who was born on Roanoke twenty years ago. She will be second cousin to me—and her name is Virginia Dare."

Virginia's hand went to her bosom, and her blue eyes streamed out to him, as her breast heaved and she choked for breath. "I—am—that same maiden!" she managed to gasp out at length, as her eyes went downcast under his keen glance.

Bruster burst out into hilarious laughter. "Nay, then, I have won both wagers! That with Sir Walter—and that with myself!

"Virginia—I was but a lad when you were born—ah, but the romance of thee! The first white child born in the New World! 'Tis said Will Shakespeare hath a play in mind, writ about thy story. Think of the brave mystery o't—the child carried off by the savages when a baby—la, his 'Twelfth Night' is not a candle to't!"

"Nay, then," blushed Virginia, "but here cometh my fayther, Ananias. Fayther, this gentleman is none other than our cousin, Will Bruster!" she called out, getting respectfully to her feet.

Ananias Dare came tottering into the room as she spoke. "Bruster?—Bruster?" he murmured, searching back through his memories. "Oh, aye! Thou art own cousin to John White, Governor of Roanoke—I recall thee, lad, as a stripling in England. Why have they sent no ship for us, lad?"

"But they did!" said Bruster, energetically, from his cot. "We have had stirring times in England. The Spanish did send a great armada against us. and we all took ship, and did beat them right manfully, but, for three years after you were left on Roanoke, the seas were not passable, except for armed ships.

"Then came John White, seeking ye, but the fort was deserted, the grass growing in the doorsteps of the houses, and but the one word 'Croatan' carved on an oaken tree to tell him whither ye had gone. There was no cross on it. and John White's armor

still hung in his house untouched, so he opined that ye had gone of your free will and had settled on the mainland—but no trace of ye could he find. How came ye to this far laud?"

"Manteo brought us," said Ananias simply.

"Aye; I have seen him," said Will. "He was the friendly chief that was baptized on Roanoke a week before Virginia, here. He came to England with the first party, and was received by our gracious queen. Is he still alive?"

"Verily! And head sachem now of all the Croatans," replied Dare. "Of a day he cometh to the fort, bringing word through his young men that Opecanough would fain attack us with many war canoes.

"To flee by land would be for all to be massacred, for we had nine children and seventeen women with us, so he came for us all with many great canoes from the south, and we went for three days' sail down the sound, and then traveled overland through the Croatan country, where we were well received, for his sake.

"And here we have abode, for nigh twenty years, although twice in the last three years have we organized expeditions to have speech with those whites that, we hear through the Indians, are now far to the north of us. We got as far as the country of the Chowan who are friendly to us, but there Opecanough or Powhatan, we know not which, fell upon us, and only six men besides myself—and Virginia and John Sampson who were scarce grown—escaped. How managed you to reach us?"

Bruster sat up. "Lend me thine aid to yonder chair, Virginia," he asked. "I do feel that soon I can be up and about. 'Twas on a wager with Sir Walter, and also for Cousin John White's sake, who pineth for news of his daughter—"

"She is dead," broke in Ananias, as Virginia gave a little sob at the recollection. "She died ten years ago. Virginia is all I, and the governor have left."

"Oh, the sad news!" cried Bruster, sympathetically. "The poor lady!—but, to go on with my tale—I came to Jamestown, as we call it, with the earliest settlers. Twice did Captain John Smith send out an

expedition to find ye, but Powhatan's chiefs led them astray. Even now there is talk of another, under one Captain Samuel Argall.

"But I would have none of it! One must learn the ways of the savages in this country, to travel and explore in safety, and so, by stealth, I succeeded in passing through Powhatan's country, and, for several months, lived on the Chowan with the friendly chief, Eyanoco. Here learned I the ways of the savages, and then set forth to find ye.

"Eyanoco did say that ye were on the fourth big river to the south of his country, so I came through the Tuscaroras by aid of a bark scroll given me by Eyanoco, but when I came into the Cherokees, who are hostile, it was needful to travel by night and go with great cunning and stealth. But I eluded their war parties, stole a punt from a Cherokee village, and so came hither, pursued by war canoes from which, by the grace of God, I was able to escape—though several of the savages were slain by my hand."

"'Tis bad," said Dare, shaking his head. "I fear that they will send war chiefs to demand thee of the Croatans. We will go to Manteo and claim his protection; as soon as thou canst move."

"Faith, and I am ready now!" said Bruster, energetically. "My wound is but a trifle, I tell thee!"

"Not so!" broke in Virginia, earnestly, "Thou wert in a swoon of it when I found thee. Thou must not stir! I will bring food anon."

"Ah, Virginia!" laughed Bruster, "wilt captain me! Art a girl of spirit! We shall take her back to England, eh? Cousin Dare—there be men amongst you that will follow me back again; I trow?"

Old Dare shook his head, dully. "Nay, but we be few and are growing old; I fear that it may not be," he demurred. "Man, we be scattered through the villiages, a few here, a few there; and all have married amongst the savages.

"This life is good, and peaceful, and wholesome—I, for one, would care not to return to the old country, where one must swink and starve, year in and year out, to live; nor to the settlements to the north,

where men do quarrel amongst themselves and broil with the heathen, affronting the savages daily and at war with them always."

Virginia had come in during this speech with a maple-knob bowl in her hands. She looked at him, open-mouthed with astonished indignation.

"For shame, fayther!" she cried. "Hast no wish to leave this savagery and see thine own people again? Ah, the brave sights of London town of which ye told me on winter nights! This is but the mere existence of the deer and the pig that we lead here! Oh, say thou wilt go, fayther, dear," she implored, with tears coming.

"Girl, get thee hence!" ordered Dare, sternly. "Thou dost forget thy manners! Out on thee!"

The girl fled, sobbing, from the room.

"Nay, cousin," chid Bruster, gently, "thou were too hard on her. Surely some of this folk will venture back with me, and she might be of the company."

"How wilt go? Scarce hadst thou come here alive! To return up the river is not possible, against the swift current and the arrows of the Cherokees; down-stream the Pamlicos are of a mind with the Pamunkeys that no white man may venture into their country.

"As for Virginia—I am growing old and cannot spare her. She shall marry that good youth, John Sampson, in due time."

Indeed this feeling of contentment seemed to prevail among the remnants of the settlers in the village as Bruster saw more of them during the day. Those that had Indian wives, and had fathered the green-eyed and even gray-eyed children playing happily about, flatly refused to consider leaving the tribe.

They plied Bruster with questions about the doings in the great world, but to leave their peaceful fields of corn and cotton, and their abundant fish and game, to be had for the taking, was a thing that they had no desire for.

On the following day, Will and Virginia, with Dare and Berry and a party of Croatans, set forth for Manteo's village. As they approached it, over a fairly good road, no doubt the first in America, Bruster

noted more log huts, interspersed with the brush and cane wigwams of the Croatans so unlike the stout palisades of the warlike Cherokees.

A glint of armor shone in the knot of people coming out to meet them, and Bruster, in addition to the stately old chief, Manteo, met a few more of the old settlers, bedecked in ancient London finery, the men wearing the cuirasse and hauberk of England in honor of the occasion.

It seemed hard to realize that Chief Manteo, a kindly visaged, grizzled old savage, in his tattoo and eagle's feathers, with cotton shawl over shoulder, had visited in England, was the trusted friend of Sir Walter Raleigh, and had even been presented to Queen Elizabeth.

"My young brother is very, very welcome!" beamed Manteo. "We have heard of his bold exploits, and that he bringeth us word from Sir Walter," he smiled.

"Indeed, 'tis so!" returned Will heartily. "His lordship hath in no wise forgotten ye, and hath spent much moneys to come at some tidings of you, but times have been stern in old England, and every ship hath been needed to repel the Spanish invader."

"We too, have done right diligently; many times have I sent runners, and twice have my white brethren essayed expeditions to have speech with the whites of the North. But we are surrounded by tribes that are not lovable to the white man. Even now, my young men tell me, there cometh a party under one Captain Samuel Argall from the north, but it bideth with the Mangoags, who will not let them pass."

Answering volleys of questions, Bruster turned and entered the village.

Manteo touched him on the arm.

"Our only fort, the house of the Great Spirit," he said, pointing with great pride to a log church that stood in the center of the place. "The red man knoweth but dimly of Him; to the white was given the full revelation," he added, devoutly. "All my people be Christians. It is good."

Bruster gazed curiously at the first steeple in America. A great, standing, dead cypress had been hewn to a tall point, and against it was built a stout log church, the tree forming the front with a door cut

through its hollow base. Two other log houses and a multitude of the characteristic Croatan pole and cane huts formed the town, while on every side stretched the cultivated fields, corn, cotton, beans, squash—even English wheat!

A new sensation in connection with this folk gradually came over Bruster, and for some time he could not just make it out. Once alone and talking quietly with Virginia, the reason back of it dawned on him. Here was peace; the one spot on earth where men did not quarrel; where war was unknown; where striving and starvation were things undreamed of.

For twenty years, Manteo had told him, there had been peace with the Cherokees to the north and the Pamlicos to the east. Even the whites had come under the spell of it; too few to make any organized trouble with the Croatans, they had fallen in readily with their peaceful ways. The fields and the forests gave bountifully of wealth, and the Croatans, who were known to be warlike enough when once aroused, had been let alone to enjoy their industry. Under Christian Manteo, causes for quarrel with their neighbors had been justly settled, and the result had been an Arcadian, bucolic existence, only to be paralleled by that of the Hopis to-day.

It impressed Bruster deeply. Man of war as he had been from his youth, it filled him with admiration. The serenity of it, however, chafed on his adventurous, warlike spirit.

"What! And this folk do naught but raise beans and hie them to church!" he stamped. "A pox on it! What sayest thou, Virginia—wilt no man return with me to the settlements? I had as well not ventured my body on this enterprise as bide here."

"Nay, there is one that will second thee!" she laughed, softly. "A brave youth—like unto thee! He is living two villiages from here; truly shall I ask him if he shall go with thee. Would that I might go with thee, too!" she burst out, looking at him longingly.

"Wouldst thou—just, Virginia!" exclaimed Will, his fine eyes glowing at her roguishly. "Art a maid of spirit! Dost

thou fear naught of the forest and the savages?"

"Man, naught fear I of either!" she returned, throwing back her head scornfully. "This is but the life of my fayther's sow! Mine own people do call to me—would that I were a man, strong and bold as thou art! Wilt take me?"

"Maid—it may not be," said Bruster, kindly, taking both her hands in his. "Thou hast the gamesome spirit, but 'tis in the body of a mere girl. We must fight, and e'en be taken and put to the torture, mayhap, before ever we see Jamestown again."

The girl cried out in dismay. "Then stay, brave sir, stay with us!" she begged, impulsively.

"Nay, it may not be," retorted Will, shortly, "My wager is but half won. Fetch thou this youth that ye prate of, girl."

Bruster found even the younger men obdurate about accompanying him. They did not wish to break the peace with their neighbors, as they considered themselves Croatans and their tribe would be responsible for whatever they did. Manteo also, begged him to remain, and, eager as he was to aid him, could offer no plan.

"To the rising sun, for two sleeps, journey, my son, lies the country of the Pamlicos, and they are of a mind with Powhatan that no white man may set foot on their land. To the setting sun are the Cherokees, who are already out on the war-path after thee; and they also lie between thee and the Tuscaroras who are friendly. Nevertheless, my young men will guide thee through the Cherokee country if thou wilt not bide with us. Manteo hath spoken."

And so it was settled. But, on the next day, came an event which changed everything. Two stalwart Cherokee braves, accompanied by a party of Croatans, came into the village. In their hands one bore a ceremonial tomahawk, with a flint head and bedecked with red feathers; and the other, a great calumet, a peace-pipe whose stone bowl had come from the Far West, from the quarry beside the Father of Waters.

They demanded to see Manteo, and a council accordingly was called. Will watched curiously, to see his own people squatting in the circle with the red men under the mulberry-trees, passing the calumet from mouth to mouth.

Then the visiting chief made a long address in Cherokee. As he pointed frequently at Bruster, and his pantomime was expressive, Will already knew the object of his visit before Manteo began speaking.

Manteo arose to reply, and Virginia, sitting beside Bruster, translated the Cherokee's message. "Thou hast killed two of their braves, he saith, and it shall be war between our folk and them unless Manteo giveth thee up! Ah—Heaven forefend!" she choked huskily, the tears coming to her eyes.

"Tush, girl!" grinned Bruster. "Weep not for me! 'Tis one thing for him to give me up—and yet another for them to take me!"

Manteo's speech was halting and conciliatory in its tones. The peace of twenty years hung on his words. He offered much corn and cotton and wampum in reparation, but the Cherokee chief was obdurate.

"A canoe for a canoe, a life for a life; it is the law," he sayeth," translated Virginia tremblingly. "We must not only restore the stolen canoe, but must give up thee and one other, to do with as they wish."

Bruster's own heart was now stirred with doubts as to his duty in the matter. Of a genial, careless, adventuresome nature, while he loved danger and hattle, he had no wish to involve others in his affairs. It seemed something sacrilegious to disturb the sacred, holy peace of this people. The Croatans were implacable fighters when once aroused, and there was a large admixture of white blood in them, so he foresaw a long and bloody war with the fierce and powerful Cherokees if he did not interfere. And, Manteo, he could see, had no intention of giving him up. Instantly his decision was formed.

"Nay, then," he interrupted, getting up to address the Cherokee, "it ill becomes a gentleman of Sir Walter's own train to be hartered amongst savages like a sheep! Of

mine own venture came I here. Alas, that I had to slay your warriors! But ye came against me armed, asking a great price, my life, for a mere canoe.

"This people shall take no hurt because of me. Cherokee—ye shall freely have me—if ye can take me! Manteo"—addressing the old chieftain—"I do not claim the hospitality and protection of thy tribe; when I leave, Cherokee, I shall meet my obligation to thy people—as warrior to warrior! There is yet war betwixt ye and me. Art satisfied?"

He sat down, and Berry translated for him. The Cherokees smiled with grim pleasure, their glances flashing at him admiringly. Then the elder arose to speak.

"My brother has spoken like a great chief and a brave man," saith he," translated Virginia in a whisper, "and e'en so think I!" she added, her eyes glowing at him artlessly. "'The Cherokees will await his coming, and will treat him as a great chief should he'—which meaneth they will put thee to the torture if taken. Ah, no, thou must not let them!" she cried.

"Fear not, maiden—I mind them not a fly!" chuckled Bruster, his brown beard waggling merrily over the collet of his cuirasse. "With this good sword I shall cut my way through them, or elude them and so win back to Jamestown. How much longer may I bide here, chief?" he asked as the Cherokees took their departure.

"One sun, is the Indian law; then they may come and take thee. Sooner would I plunge this nation in blood!" said Manteo.

"Nay, but ye shall not stir a finger!" replied Bruster earnestly. "My deeds shall not bring war upon ye, nor break the peace that lieth between ye and the Cherokees. Marry, I shall set forth this very night!"

III.

VIRGINIA did not witness Bruster's departure. Setting forth in the late afternoon, with the avowed purpose of finding the youth who would accompany him, she hid in the pines, determined to await his coming and then track him as closely as she dared.

Like a knight in glittering armor he had

come into her life, bringing the light and promise of the great outside world in his very presence—that life which had formed many a winter tale of her parents', and that she so yearned to taste herself. And—she was gloriously, completely, intoxicatingly in love with him!

Such a man! Like a star above all other men she had ever known! In his fearless yet kindly soul he was the very essence and epitome of the brave courtiers of the great Elizabeth, whom she held in reverence above all other women.

To guide him through the Cherokee country, to give him the best of her knowledge of Indian woodcraft, and then to return home with him, for England was always the home of her dreams—that was the height of Virginia's ambition. And then, if he should so much as look upon her with the eyes of love—Virginia trembled with delight at the thought, and the hot blush mantled to her cheek; that would be too much happiness for any girl to hope!

Twilight came, and a sickle moon shed a soft radiance as Virginia kept her vigil. Then, with a hound of her heart, she saw him coming through the pines, matchlock over shoulder, sword swinging at side, and a careless whistle on his lips.

Here, under the tall long-leaf pines, it was almost dusk, and she had no trouble in avoiding detection. She turned and followed. The way led north through the long grove, and then out over a bear-oak barren.

It was quite dark when he plunged down into the dense tangle of cane, cypress, gums and holly that formed the creek bottom of the water-course that marked the boundary of the Cherokee country. Bruster stopped, and then vanished in the cane.

After a long wait, out of its depths issued the bark of the dog-fox. It was immediately answered by the bark of another dog-fox across the bottom. Virginia shook her head. That was an answer to his signal, and the Cherokees lacked finesse, she decided, or they would have answered, naturally, with the bark of the vixen, so as to lure him on.

Bruster evidently detected the trap, also, for presently he emerged from the cane and

circled to the east, Virginia following him. A mile farther on, he went into the cane again, and, after a while, the ghostly hoot of the barred owl sounded through the cypress. Virginia smiled at the apt imitation; the man was a thorough woodsman, for the bird itself could not have done better! But it was answered by the call of a *male* owl across the creek.

Again Virginia shook her head. Evidently every foot of the creek shore was watched. Bruster came back, and for a long while stood under a big pine while the moon slowly set.

This was evidently what he was waiting for, and Virginia felt that it was time for her, too, to act, for she could now no longer see him. She circled to the east, and hid under a huge cypress down in the swamp. After a time the low, quavering call of the soot owl came to her ears from the uplands behind her.

Virginia answered with the *check!* of the female. Long minutes of silence passed, and then, in the intense blackness of the place, the click of the small owl's beak sounded close at hand. Virginia answered, with the soft tick of thumb-nail against finger-nail.

Presently she saw his figure, glooming around the bole of the cypress, almost indistinguishable in the velvety blackness. His sword was drawn as he advanced, step by step. Then she arose from her knees and her hand closed softly around his sword-wrist, while another stole around his neck.

"Friend!" she breathed. "It is I—Virginia!"

"*Virginia!*" His arm shot around her body. "Maiden, what dost thou here?" he whispered shakily.

"Take me! Take me home, my lord!" she whispered ardently. "I—I—am that youth who would accompany thee," she ended confusedly.

"Now, by the splendor of God!" breathed Will, as his eyes glowed admiringly at her, "art a valiant maid! Canst shoot?" he whispered, handing her a bow and quiver.

"Marry, that can I!" returned Virginia. "Since I was a child of a child!"

"Nay, then, we two be an army!" laughed Bruster softly. "Hast any plan by which we may come through these heathen? 'Tis the women, I note, that have always the quicker wit."

Virginia puckered her brow and remained for some time in silent thought. Then:

"Come! I know of a place where the creek is not like to be guarded," Virginia whispered, stretching out her hand to Bruster.

She led the way through the cane and across the dark uplands, silent as a shadow. They came to a sand barren, where for miles the short bear oaks covered the soil. The going was easier here, and one could see the stars overhead.

Mile after mile of it she traversed, while always the black wall of the creek bottom bounded them to the north. Finally the ground became more broken, and the swales cut with short, steep ravines. Briers towered overhead, making their progress slow and irritating in the extreme, but, bending and dodging with her supple young body, Virginia led the way through them.

Then she came to an abrupt halt. A wild, tangled jungle of oaks and briers leaned every which way, and, in the dim light of dawn, Bruster perceived what appeared to be a high shelf of rock barring their path. It led straight athwart the wall of cypress that marked the creek.

"Man saith that once on a time the earth did heave and rock, so that no man could stand," said Virginia in a low tone. "Many years ago 'twas. When the tremor goeth away, this cleft was left. It reacheth for many miles into the Cherokee country. Come."

She wormed her way silently along through the tangle of vegetation under the fissure. It was a wild, eery spot, with great log windfalls crossing it, where tall trees had toppled over from the brink of the shelf. Here, if anywhere, they might slip through unobserved.

As they approached the creek, the roar of waters came rumbling to their ears, and again and again they stopped to listen for hostile sound or signal. The noise of falling water grew louder and louder, and at length they came to a rocky gorge, through

which the creek tumbled in whitecapped rapids.

"No man hath ever crossed here—'tis not like that it be watched," said Virginia, as Bruster's eyes sparkled with the hope of escape.

"Ha! Go to! One might e'en swing over by yon vine that groweth aloft up into the cypress!" quoth Bruster exultingly, as he scanned the possibilities.

He hacked at the base of the vine with his sword, where the thick muscadine had started on its long voyage to the tree-tops. It soon swung clear. Without more ado he grasped it strongly, and, with a running leap, swung across the rapids and landed on a rock ledge on the far side.

"Now, girl, have a courage, and do as thou hast seen me!" he called to Virginia, swinging the vine back to her.

Like a floating butterfly she made the run and swung lightly over. Bruster caught her in his arms—and he did not let her go! For she was very warm and living, and good to hold, and her fair young body a sweet armful as she clung to him. His eyes looked deep into hers as he held her close in his arms.

"Virginia—dost love me?" whispered Will, the glowing fire of love burning in his own. "I swear thou art the very maid of my soul!"

"Thou knowest all, my lord—I do but know I love thee!" said the girl humbly. "Whither thou goest, go I—"

Then a look of horror froze the words on her lips. Her eyes dilated with terror, as they looked over Bruster's shoulder, and a sob gasped up from her bosom. Bruster turned—to face the stern visage of a Cherokee chieftain, standing quietly beside them! He grinned broadly as Bruster whipped out his sword, but made no hostile move with his spear.

"Out! Stand thy distance, fellow!" gritted Bruster, throwing a protecting arm around Virginia and shielding her with the rapier blade.

The savage smiled and waved his free arm nonchalantly. There were rustlings in the underbrush, and wild painted and feathered faces glared out at them from the rocks.

"'Tis a bushment!" exclaimed Bruster bitterly. "Virginia, we are undone! This blade shall slay thee, and then all of them it can bite!" Let us enter heaven's portals together, sweet betrothed!"

But Virginia began to speak to the Cherokee. Bruster judged, from the entreaty in her tones, that she was haggling for their lives. He interrupted her harshly.

"Pish! Girl, have an end! I count them not a fly—nor twenty such! Have at thee, wretch!"

Virginia restrained him as the Cherokee chief began to speak. His voice was measured and authoritative, and he dropped his arm in conclusion with an air of finality. At his words Virginia sprang to the fore, baring her breast to them passionately and repeating over and over two words in Cherokee. The chief heard her in calm dignity, but made no reply.

"What is it that you say, Virginia?" asked Bruster, breaking in anxiously.

"They would harter my life for thine!" declared the girl scornfully. "And I have bid them take mine and welcome! Me they can slay now with their arrows, and will do so if thou dost not yield thee. But, saith the chief, thou art a great warrior, therefore me they offer to spare, and I may return to the Croatans, if thou wilt enter their tribe—and—and—take the squaw of War Eagle—whom thou hast slain—to—to wife!" sobbed Virginia, hot jealous tears coming as she hid her eyes in her arm.

"Never!" declared Bruster resolutely. "E'en die by my hand, Virginia: I and my good sword will face our fate!"

The Cherokee sensed the drift of his words, for he uttered a short, harsh command, and instantly a dozen arrows were drawn to the head, aimed at Virginia's unprotected bosom.

"Nay—hold!" shouted Bruster hastily. "I cannot do't! Girl—I love thee! I cannot see thee slain! 'Tis a brave and warlike people—tell the chief we will go with them, and I will care for the bereft squaw—but 'tis for thy life, Virginia! Tell him we are man and wife! Together we live—or together we die—let him choose!"

She translated, and the chief's face softened. He raised his left hand.

"Peace! There is peace between me and thee, white man!" he exclaimed.

"Doth he accept, then? My hand and honor on't!" exclaimed Bruster, joyfully catching the drift of his words. "Truly, 'tis a warlike nation—one after my own heart! Come, Virginia—thou wert worth it!"

The rest is history. Forty years later, in 1650, the first settlers in North Carolina found the Croatans speaking old Elizabethan English and tilling the soil, beside the Lumbee River. And, among the Cherokees ruled a famous chief, Tab Chee, the Thunderer, who was green-eyed and of white descent, perhaps the son of William Bruster and Virginia Dare, for he possessed the only matchlock in the Cherokee Nation, and with him the earliest parties of explorers from the Virginia Colonies made the first treaty with the Cherokees.



STARS

BY KATHRINE BOLENIUS RITCHIE

ASTRONOMERS say
 You are peopled worlds,
 But I believe them not.
 To me you are eyes,
 Soft, soothing, and tender.
 Shining with unearthly radiance—
 Eyes of lost loved ones
 Watching over their own!

The Black Dragon

by Leslie Burton Blades

CHAPTER I.

HUANG.

IT had been no easy task to win the confidence of Hosing Huang, but to-night it seemed to Tanner as though he had accomplished his purpose. Leaning back against the dingy wall of the smoke-veiled room in Manila he waited.

Huang would appear suddenly, gliding swiftly out of the shadows with noiseless movement. Tanner smiled at his own mental image.

When the chief had sent him to Manila he had been delighted. The prospect of cornering the smugglers operating among the islands had awakened vague, exciting possibilities. All the old monotony of the service had vanished in a dim haze of dream. It was a game worth playing. The Chinese were wise with a stealthy guile that demanded all his subtlety and knowledge of intrigue.

He watched the half-dozen natives at the dirty tables speculatively. Overhead the smoky oil lamps swayed mystically. Then Huang appeared. He came as Tanner expected, gliding into his vision as though by magic, his black almond eyes darting around the room.

"There is no silence so still as Huang's silence," Tanner said slowly and his deep gray eyes became suggestive of things not to be spoken.

Huang scrutinized his shabby dress with an air of abstraction. "Are you waiting?" his melodious voice crooned.

"Even time waits on the secret one," re-

sponded Tanner, who was wise in the ways of the East.

Huang drew out the chair opposite and leaned across the table. "From Singapore you make your way here—is the tale true?"

"True as the sun. I laugh at the stupidity of man."

"Why do you wish to go on the Black Dragon?"

"I have said I must be in Java." Tanner leaned close as he answered. "Americans are too many here and the boat I take must take that which I carry." Tanner watched the Chinese eyes glisten at the last phrase.

"There are those among the Chinese of Manila who deal in curios." Huang's tone suggested a lurking doubt of the necessity for flight.

"There are curios no Chinaman here could sell. It is not likely that the theft of Singapore can become the merchandise of Manila. Is not all law searching for the jewels?"

For a long time Huang did not answer. At last he rose, his woolen shirt glintingly, warmly green in the yellow light. "The gold—you have it with you? My captain would be most indignant."

Tanner placed a leather pouch on the table. Its open mouth became the dark circumference of a yellow glitter. As Huang took the bag his face betrayed nothing, but his fingers clutched eagerly. He spoke caressingly.

"The Black Dragon sails at midnight. We must hurry."

Tanner followed the silent figure into the

night. They had gone deep into a lightless silence beneath a far pier before he was allowed to walk beside his guide.

"It must be repeated," the Chinaman said, "that you best stay concealed. It is not well to provoke the captain."

"I will be as nothing. I am nothing."

They paused and a rowboat was dragged from a black hole where it had lain among the filth. Tanner was accustomed to strange things, but the sudden sense of strangeness, so intricately tangled with a vague feeling of repeating a former experience, was disconcerting.

Feeling for his weapons, he stepped into the boat. Huang took the oars and they rocked perilously out into the black.

Unable to decide how much of his story the Chinaman believed, Tanner kept his hand on his gun. He had given himself out as having stolen the jewels which had vanished from the house of the Governor of Singapore. He was not known at Manila. That was in his favor, as were the Chinese papers he had brought to Huang from Hong-Kong.

He weighed his chances of discovery and smiled. "At least, this promises interest," he told himself.

The boat came up abruptly beside a dark hulk which made a denser shadow in the starless night. Huang guided his hand to a rope ladder and, without a word, Tanner climbed. When he reached the deck he waited. His guide followed and still in silence led him down into the hold of the vessel.

"You will remain here. I bring food." Huang was gone without waiting for an answer.

After an interminable wait in the inky blackness Tanner felt the vessel moving. Still utterly without assurance as to his position, he fell asleep, but it was no peaceful slumber.

Strange dreams unlike any he had ever known paraded grotesque images before his mind. There were quaint Chinese in unfamiliar dress gathered about him. Interwoven with their speech were distant sounds of turbulent water. He stirred uneasily and awoke.

A faint light shot through the darkness in

a single bar. To his amazement a woman's voice, rich and full of youth, was issuing an order. He listened perplexedly.

"Bring him up. Huang, you are a stupid daw."

He heard his guide of the night answer: "But if he has the jewels they are ours."

"I do not allow murder on my ship. Go get him."

Tanner drew his revolver, then replaced it in his pocket, keeping his hand on it in readiness for immediate use.

"Come on now, lively, you!" The girl spoke sharply.

A square sheet of light appeared and in it Huang's face grew distinct peering down from above.

"You must come," his voice growled angrily.

Tanner stood up. In the Chinaman's eyes he read disappointment. At least there was no suspicion of his true identity. The rogue had sought to murder him for the Singapore jewels.

"I follow the advice of the trustworthy." He mounted the ladder which was now plainly visible. As his head issued from the hole he glanced around.

The woman was standing a few feet distant. Her skirt was blown against her by the wind, setting the lines of her body out clearly. Her youth was evident, and radiant energy animated her very silence. Clear blue eyes studied him intensely while a mass of black hair hung free in the wind. Her straight, well-formed lips were compressed and a frown wrinkled her forehead delightfully.

"Good morning!" She spoke perfect English and Tanner realized with increasing wonder that she was white.

"I must apologize for being a stowaway," he ventured, at a loss for anything better to say.

"It's scarcely worth your while." Her manner prohibited an answer.

Huang stood by watching them intently. She turned on him suddenly and her eyes flashed. "You idiot!" she snapped, "to think he stole the Singapore jewels."

"But he brought papers from a certain house in Hong Kong." The Chinaman protested with some asperity.

"Go below and leave him with me," she commanded.

The man hesitated, bowed and stole away.

CHAPTER II.

TWO DRAGONS.

WHEN they were alone she turned again to Tanner. "Your daring exceeds your good sense."

"I confess I don't quite appreciate—"

"Don't you? I saw you at Tokyo two years ago when I was there with father. So you thought to catch me, did you?"

"You!" He stared at her in open amazement.

"I am captain and owner of this craft," she said.

He was speechless. The girl eyed him scornfully.

"My contempt for you grows momentarily, Mr. Government Tanner."

He felt his cheeks grow hot under her blazing eyes.

"I—I thought an Irishman owned this ship," he stammered in a weak attempt at justification.

"An Irish *woman* does. Father died."

"Oh, I'm so sorry." He failed to check himself in time.

"You needn't be. I'm quite as successful a law-breaker."

"I meant that—"

"You are my prisoner. I should let Huang knife you as he intended. Never bribe my mate. He always tells."

Tanner grinned. "I had to get aboard, you know. It was my order."

"I shall expect you to leave the vessel as soon as we touch land. You will make no attempt to arrest me."

"That was part of my instruction," he admitted.

"Your orders are reversed by the highest authority now recognized."

She turned away from him, then came back swiftly. He wondered at the strength so gracefully revealed in the hand she extended.

"I will appreciate the gift of your revolver."

Despite his better judgment his sense of humor would not be suppressed. "I know no one to whom I would rather present it, captain."

He gave her the gun, bowing.

Her face did not relax.

"It is quite as valuable minus your little politeness."

"Like the gun, they are forced from me." His eyes met hers frankly. Her brow contracted; then she smiled mischievously.

"In return, may I ask your presence at dinner?" There was a note of amusement in her voice. "I begin to feel the charm of flattery. It can't be resisted, you know."

"Thank you," he bowed. "May I be favored with the name of my captain?"

"My name—why, it is a charmed word in a certain house in Hong-Kong." She imitated her mate's inflection.

"I am not familiar with that place of such power." He laughed suddenly. "The papers were given to me at the Manila office."

"I shall never deal with that Hong-Kong firm again." She laughed.

"It would seem advisable."

"Shall we go to my cabin?"

"But I still lack a name by which to address you."

"Oh, I am Dana O'Brien. You heard of my father."

He nodded, concealing with difficulty the start she gave him.

"You aren't the Smuggler O'Brien's daughter?"

They walked along the deck together.

"I am. Are you duly horrified?"

He did not answer. Her clear, warm beauty was creating a complex question in his mind. Smuggler O'Brien had been a figure among the renegade spirits of the islands. To see his daughter, to hear her well-modulated voice and to realize that she had both education and culture despite her breeding was too startlingly unreal.

"You are thinking how strange it is?" She looked at him and he saw a mysterious little kindling in the blue depths of her eyes.

"I was," he admitted, and into his own mind came a dim impression that all this was somehow natural, a part of old memories or a dream being actually lived.

"I wonder why all this seems so inevitable?"

She sat opposite him at the table in her cabin. He looked around interestedly. Above the table a great bronze lamp hung by four chains from the ceiling. Behind her the berth creaked slightly to the sway of the vessel.

The hooks on her shelf and table revealed her companionship with the master poets and novelists. Opposite the bookcase hung a great black dragon tapestry, exquisite in workmanship and beauty. As he turned from it their eyes met and answered each other wonderingly as though the sight of that dragon had charged the room with memories too vague for recall.

"I know that dragon!" Tanner exclaimed in a startled tone.

She stared at him without answering. He grew embarrassed.

"Of course that was ridiculous," he muttered, "I never saw it before."

She smiled faintly, something inscrutable in the curve of her lips. "One would remember it," she said. "There isn't another like it. It has a peculiar scaled tail, you see, and the eyes are speaking intelligence. It belonged to father."

He studied it more carefully. In the creature's eyes there was a fascinating suggestion of intelligence, a strange disturbing glint caused by a unique spin of thread worked through the eyeballs.

"It seems to me something I know about, some special story."

"Have you heard much of the dragon tales?" She leaned her elbows on the table. He shook his head negatively.

"It isn't likely, then, that you know of this one." She seemed about to tell him the story; then, changing her mind, she laughed. "Really, Mr. Tanner," she chided, "you brought the real mystery of the Orient into my cabin. How ungovernmental!"

"I'm frankly puzzled," he told her. "It's all familiar, this cabin—and yet it isn't. Things are—things are not quite somehow as I should have expected to see them."

She gave him one swift glance, a faint fear in her eyes; then with a shrug she

rose. "Are you proposing to rearrange my cabin?"

"No," he answered, "no, though I could suggest."

"You can suggest nothing." Her tone was unnecessarily sharp. He noticed that she had become nervous.

"I think," she said, as though speaking to herself, "that I will put back to Manila, despite the protest of Huang, and leave you there."

He did not interrupt her. After a moment she walked to the tapestry. Standing before it she looked the pictured dragon squarely in the eyes. "Or," she murmured, quite unaware of Tanner's stare, "I shall have to blind you, you mocker of realities."

Watching her, Tanner felt his blood rush in a dizzy sweep to his head; then he grew calm again. It had seemed to him that he must have expected her to stand absorbed before that picture.

He walked over and stood beside her. Through the open port-hole the tropical sun shone upon her black hair and gave it luster. He studied the tapestry carefully for a second time.

Woven of silken thread, it must have taken years to complete. The dragon was at least six feet long. Its tail curved slightly to the right; the black armored skin was edged with a dull gold scarcely discernible.

Each scale was lightly touched with it. The head was oddly shaped and the eyes were a strange red save for that intangible line of greenish gold in them.

Neither spoke. Suddenly Tanner moved. As though under hypnotic control he put out his hand and lifted the tapestry. As he did so his face became pale and another personality seemed to possess him. On the opposite side was the similar dragon, gold in color, its scales edged in black; its green eyes streaked with reddish gold.

"I thought so," he murmured involuntarily.

"You didn't." Her contradiction was almost panicky. "You couldn't!"

He stared at her blanched face. She, too, was changing. In her wide eyes he read the same wondering fear that gave his own nerves a chill tenseness.

"I say you did not. How could you?"

The room was suddenly alert with intangible thoughts.

He brushed his forehead perplexedly. "No," he answered, weakly coming to himself. "I couldn't, of course."

She did not move. Abruptly, as though drawn by an irresistible will, he left the cabin.

Outside the deck shone under the blazing sun. The ocean was like burnished glass and the smooth peace of the open sea restored his calm. What had taken place seemed now definitely unreal. It was absurd, preposterous; but why had he lifted the tapestry?

What had he expected to see? Had he been the victim of a hypnotic control?

He paced the deck meditatively. At the back of his brain a persistent taut strain seemed pulling for possession of his consciousness. He lit a pipe resolutely, refusing to think of the dragon or of the blue-eyed girl before it. Her whimsicality had prompted some half hypnotic joke upon him.

She had been amusing herself with Eastern foolery at his expense. Well, it should not continue.

Huang appeared beside him smiling deprecatingly. "Captain O'Brien begs that you please excuse her from dinner."

"Certainly." He felt unnecessarily relieved.

"You will dine with me in my cabin."

"Very well. He left the mate standing beside the rail. It was growing more difficult for him to understand his situation. As he walked the deck he asked himself why he, Tanner, was being treated so hospitably by the captain, who knew his governmental position.

True, she had said he was her prisoner, but her treatment was not that of a smuggler captain toward a detective. Was she merely being romantically generous or was it a love of adventure in her that prompted this strange conduct?

He was not able to decide. Resolving that there must be a reason still unrevealed, he returned to Huang.

"What is the story of the black dragon in the cabin?" he asked abruptly, returning in thought to the mystery of that tapestry.

The Oriental's face was inscrutable.

"There is no story. Her father obtained the picture somewhere."

"I see." He knew it was useless to persist.

"In but few minutes we dine." The mate smiled.

"I shall be delighted," he answered, and turned away.

Looking back suddenly he caught Huang glaring at him venomously. Something in the man's eyes warned him of subtle dangers. In that look was a menace of things distinctly Oriental and Tanner resolved to be watchfully alert.

CHAPTER III.

THE WAY OF FATE.

A WARM wind filled the sails of the Black Dragon with speed. They bulged in white bowls, their surfaces glistening under the moon. The sea was aglow with phosphorous, and out of the silent shimmer flying fish leaped in streaks of gold. Above the racing vessel the stars hung like mellow lamps in the liquid black of the tropical night.

Tanner could not sleep. The song of the wind in the taut rigging was like some strange lute. His head felt queer. He was eternally watching the pieces of furniture, half expecting to see the round painted wood become something different, something old and antique wrought in rosewood and ornate with precious stones. The expectation haunted him and its vague persistence provoked him to anger.

The heavy army blanket on his bunk seemed always about to become a rare silk adorned with grotesque dragon heads. At last he left the cabin. No sooner had he stepped on deck than an ungovernable impulse gripped him, a half-felt knowledge that some one awaited him there, pulled his reluctant feet toward the bow of the ship.

Again and again he brushed at his eyes irritably, as though to sweep away some film of hallucination. His mouth was dry and feverish. He told himself repeatedly that he was a fool, a fever-mad idiot, and that he must ask for quinine.

As he neared the how his heart beat like a heavy hammer. He could scarcely breathe. She was there, standing against the rail, her eyes fixed dreamily on the water ahead.

Her black hair fell over a white dress in waving curls. In his mind all sense of oddity vanished before a deep, reverent feeling. Hastily he stepped beside her, and when he spoke his voice was low and tender. The words came without his being aware of their meaning until they fell on his ear.

"What are you doing here?"

Her glance never wavered. "Waiting—waiting and praying." In her voice was a passionate joy mingled with pain. The rare color of her words burned his consciousness, and yet he realized it was not the girl he knew who spoke. He was no longer Tanner, the American. It was his control who answered her.

His body trembled uncontrollably and his lips were parched.

"Only the magnolia flower can teach the uselessness of prayer on this ship."

"Ah, but the wild flight," she whispered, clasping her hands. "We are speeding as speeds the night to be swallowed in morning."

His own voice came to him from afar, answering her. "It is the will of the Master."

Her black hair fell over her cheek as she bowed her head. She seemed an Oriental princess.

"Which is the way to the gate of fulfillment?" she asked dreamily.

He leaned closer, feeling the answer rush from his lips as though he had longed for ages to speak. The strange personality governed him. "The wise moon smiles even at lovers, knowing their hearts can but die when their tears are fallen. The wise stars smile even on lovers, knowing that desire is a lie told in the night by a false friend."

She turned toward him then, and her face was ashen. "Why do you tell me these things? Have I not fled from the place of the God? Am I not now free to fulfill our destiny?"

He reached out his arms, the arms that were his and yet not his, and she swayed toward him.

"Even the winged dragon is powerless before the kiss of love." His hands touched her shoulders. She started, shivered, and an inarticulate cry broke from her lips.

"Stop, you—you—what are you doing?" The slant of the Orient was gone from her eyes.

He fell back a step before her blazing anger. What they had just spoken he could not remember. It seemed blurred, lost in a swelling tide of common thoughts. He gasped for breath.

"I beg your pardon. What—what have I said?"

She leaned against the rail, her hands clasped together.

"Madness! What did we say?"

He tried to remember, but could not.

"You are Tanner," she stormed vehemently. "Tanner of the American service and I am Dana; Dana O'Brien, smuggler." Her voice was declarative, as though she assured herself.

"I know," he faltered, "but just now I—I thought—"

"Stop it! You did not think it. Neither did I. For heaven's sake, man, are we both mad? We must put an end to this—this—what is it?"

"I wish to God I knew. Ever since I entered your cabin things have been all tangled; vague chaotic nonsenses are upsetting my nerves."

"You said you recognized the tapestry," she almost cried.

"I lied. I never saw that dragon before."

"Of course not. It was impossible that you could have."

"Dana, are you playing with me?"

She shook her head. The distress in her face was too genuine to be doubted.

"We are both mad with fever. We must put back to Manila at once. Manila, modern and Western, is our salvation." She straightened herself as she spoke.

He wanted to agree, but something gripped his heart and instead he said: "We cannot, fate is—"

"Lies!" she interrupted. "Fate is a bugbear of the Chinese, and we *can*."

He only stared into her eyes for answer.

"For heaven's sake, man, get that look

out of your eyes. Do you want to lose yourself? Remember that you are Tanner of the service. You must not forget it, or you may sink into the black maw of that accursed thing and drag me with you." The abject terror, the dominant command of her voice shook him.

"We will put back at once?"

She nodded.

"Better call your villainous mate and tell him."

She took one step, then paused uncertainly. "What shall I say to him?"

"Say you want to put back; are you not the captain?"

She nodded before going. "Listen, the crew may protest. They are bent on this trip, for it means big money. If they knew who you really are they'd kill you."

"Whatever happens, one thing must be done. We must not forget that we are going back to Manila. She stressed the last word. "We must not see each other alone."

After a moment he agreed.

"Now to tell Huang," she said.

"Won't you need my support?"

"No, you had best not be seen."

"Very well." He saw her vanish around the deck-house.

After a moment Huang glided into sight, his yellow face wrinkled in a savage grin.

"So, you do not sleep well."

The use of the Chinese tongue carried a sudden terror to Tanner as though it possessed some potent drug in its very sound.

"No, too warm in bed." Tanner turned away.

"You like the southern sea at night?" There was a taunting bitterness in the questioner's voice.

The American whirled on him to meet his mocking eyes. "What the devil have you in your black mind, Huang?"

The Chinese made a deprecating gesture. His smile was honeyed saffron in its yellowness. "The poetry of the night is all."

"Then forget it and leave me alone."

Huang bowed and vanished.

No sooner was he gone than Tanner wished him returned, although the oily

courtesy of the man annoyed him. Seeking to reason it out and to discover the cause of his strange hypnotic state he lit his pipe and leaned over the rail.

The vessel swept over the sea with a seabird's grace. In the wake of light behind her flying-fish leaped from the foamy glow.

His meditation was interrupted by Dana's voice speaking in abrupt command. "Wait you, Huang. Shall I have to kill you?"

He whirled to see her backing toward him, half a dozen frowning Chinese following led by the mate.

"We will go on to Java." Huang's voice was politeness itself.

"As I have said, we will return to Manila! Now all of you get back to your places. I am captain here!"

"Not if we turn," roared a giant of a yellow brute.

"We go back if I have to sail this ship alone."

Huang laughed maliciously, his black eyes snapping. "Why do we turn?" He waited for an answer.

"Because I command it."

There was a moment of tense silence; then Huang spoke again. "I am no child to be deceived with lies. You are false to us for love of him. I heard to-night."

Her body grew rigid. Tanner stepped quickly forward.

"That is a lie," she said, her voice low and vehement.

"I will not be robbed by a white man and his girl. O'Brien would curse his daughter for so easy a conquest."

The exclamation that escaped her lips was lost in the report of a gun. But the careful Chinese had darted aside and the bullet sang in the night.

Huang leaped forward.

Tanner met him half-way with a smashing drive of his fist. There was a shriek, then Tanner went down under a heaving striking mass of wriggling Chinese.

When the squirming ended he was bound. He looked around for Dana. She, too, was tied, lying near him on the deck.

"Now we will go on to Java," Huang's voice crooned.

They were lifted by the sailors.

"Take them to her cabin." Huang spoke imperatively.

They were carried below. When they were left alone behind a barred door Dana turned to him wearily. Her eyes were deeply shadowed and a weak movement of her hand betrayed her exhaustion. Again her personality seemed to change.

"So we must go on and in this room."

Her words aroused him to instant panic. Instinctively his eyes followed hers to the tapestry to meet the evil gaze of the dragon.

"God help us both," he muttered. "What is it, Dana?"

She covered her face with trembling hands. "The way of fate," she moaned. "And I—I dare not tell."

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE CABIN.

OUT of an oily gray sea at dawn the light arose in pallid murkiness. The sun did not appear and the wind grew to a shrieking gale. Long wisps of black cloud, like serpentine forebodings, writhed across the sky. Dull gray masses of water heaved in sullen rollers, their edges crested with a leaping tangle of spindrift.

The day was besmirched with somber grays, pale yellowish white and smothering black. Even the tumbling clouds wore grotesque forms.

To the two sitting in silence in the cabin the scene was pregnant with desperate meanings. Every wretched color struck their eyes with fearful heart-throbbing suggestions. Things potentially dreadful rose in unformed images to their minds.

The vessel lunged through the hissing water like a panic-stricken thing. The great bronze lamp above the table swayed dizzily, its metal adornments clicking out faint vibrating tones. The tapestry quivered in trembling lines, while the dragon squirmed fiendishly. Irresistibly both pairs of human eyes turned again and again to meet its wicked red orbs.

Silence had clutched them with chilling power. Between their fitful attempts at talk long intervals lapsed. Some dread force had settled in the room to brood like

nameless horror over them. Tanner could see Dana's eyes gleaming with a strange light and he knew that his own answered that unnatural glow.

At last she broke the silence desperately. "My God!" she cried, "it's all so natural—so much as if we had done this before. Tell me that we haven't." The pleading eagerness in her voice moved him powerfully.

"You know we never saw each other before," he said through burning lips.

"I know, but the evidence is all opposing that knowledge."

"Could it be some trick of Huang's?" He spoke hopefully. "Is he one of those Chinese jugglers of human soul stuff? Isn't it possible?"

Her laugh was too terrible. He shuddered.

She leaned toward him suddenly, her eyes aflame. "No," she answered hoarsely. "It isn't Huang."

"Then what is it?"

She tossed back her hair with an abandoned gesture. Into her face color rushed and the lines of her cheek and nose were accentuated.

"If I told you, you would not believe."

"I would believe anything, Dana. Anything—only explain it if you can."

She did not move. Her look grew mysterious. Through the film of her tears he saw her expression growing dreamily intimate. A glory of passion smoldered in her eyes. Her words became melodious.

He knew from the altered quality of her voice that it was not Dana who spoke, but some new, some other, yet familiar personality.

The revelation awoke startling wild cadences in him. He felt his own consciousness swirl toward obscurity and into its place crowded a different soul. Warm, ardent thoughts leaped into life. His body twitched with the drive of a sweeping emotion.

"It is the Master. Who dares deny his power?" She was now the girl he had seen in the cabin before the dragon.

Tanner tried to speak, but what he would have said, died. Instead, he laughed, a fiercely passionate laugh of recklessness.

"Have I not dared deny all things? All things but love?"

"When the rice fields bloom again love is a new-born child," answered the girl who was not Dana.

"I am the master of love. Who speaks of spring? It is my heart and that is ever in the bloom, my flower of all rare blooms," he boasted.

Her laugh was the rich music of delighted passion.

"We ride gray seas together. Ah, it is good to live."

He started violently. Her words had shaken him with a rushing fear of disaster, a premonition of death. He was entirely Oriental in his reactions. Suddenly he knew he must be Chinese. He loved Dana, yet she was not Dana, but an Oriental princess and he, he was—yes, he was an outlaw.

"Why do you speak of life? We who are doomed—"

"Stop!" she cried. "We are not doomed. Love will outride the sea."

He smiled happily. He knew.

"I believed that once," answered the pirate who was Tanner.

At his reply she sank into her chair trembling.

"Once," she repeated, "once, and now, now you look happy that you do not believe."

"No, I was dreaming of that time."

"What dreams? Tell me what did you dream?"

She was leaning forward as though to urge his speech faster.

"I cannot. There are no words to speak that thought."

"And you who had all words to speak all thoughts, say that."

"I? I never had such power to speak."

"Ah, then you do not remember."

She was half conscious of their surroundings, seeming to be divided between two warring selves. He could not tell how much of what she said was Dana, how much some other woman speaking through those lips. He was not certain of his own words or their origin.

"We are captives of Huang," he muttered, to assure himself.

Her eyes darkened but her answer was an enigma:

"Always he drives us on and on, like the great plague of time."

"Huang," he repeated, "your first mate on the smuggling ship, the Black Dragon."

They both glanced toward the tapestry fearfully.

"That is it," she exclaimed. "Tear it from the wall, then we can defy all things. It has been our curse too long."

Neither moved. Paralysis held them.

"We dare not, my wonderful," he answered, despite his will.

"Does the freest man in the Empire say he dares not?"

Her voice was a mocking caress. He sprang to his feet.

"Dana," he shouted at her unnecessarily, "Dana, you are mad."

She smiled sweetly at him. "I am not mad, my friend. I am bowing to the inevitable."

"You talk of things I know nothing about."

"We both talk of things we only vaguely know about."

"But I will not. I will not be such a fool."

Her head sank wearily on the table. Such utter abandon to despair he had never seen. It wrung his heart. Timidly he caressed her hair as a man soothes a child.

"There, there girl," he crooned, "we will come through all this."

"Perhaps we will."

"I know we will, and when we do I will tell you something, Dana."

She looked up wonderingly. "What is it?"

"I am too tangled in my mind to attempt it now. I never know quite whether I, Tanner, or some other, will speak through my lips."

"I know." Her eyes were moist. "I, too, am afraid to talk."

Huang came in then, smiling, suave, carrying breakfast. Neither spoke to him.

"I serve myself," he explained. "There is no other I dare trust, and you both have things I must know, so I protect you."

"You villain," Tanner said, through set teeth.

Huang smiled good-humoredly. "I have long wanted to be master of this ship. Be grateful that I spare your lives and land you safe together. I had dreamed," his yellow face grew dark, "of having a wife who had been my captain, but that cannot be. She is white and a fool when white men appear."

"Ugh!" Dana shuddered convulsively.

"You get out of here or I'll throw you out." Tanner rose fiercely.

"I am going, and I leave your breakfast." The man bowed, smiling graciously as he closed the door.

Tanner arranged the food and spoke to the girl. "Will you eat, Dana?"

She shook her head emphatically. He sat alone at the table while she threw herself on her bed to rest.

All day the ship rolled through heavy seas. All day in that cabin they waged a weird battle against mysteries. At times they were lost utterly in speech neither understood. Always they recovered when the strange delirium brought them into actual touch of each other.

Night came down in a thick blackness unlit by star or moon. Huang had not appeared all day. Now he glided in and silently placed the dinner on the table; then striking a match he lit the lamp. A rare light played in the room and every scale of the dragon glistened. Huang had been drinking and he stood a moment leering.

"I think perhaps," he said, "I yet want my wife."

Tanner rose. The oil in the lamp was some Chinese preparation and its burning emitted a rich, delicate perfume.

Shakily Tanner advanced a step toward the Chinaman.

Huang smiled and turned toward the door. "In a little while I will return, and we will test the West; my white man, against the East."

He was gone.

Dana sat at the table.

In her movement of hand and arm a languor became apparent.

The perfume filled the cabin. His head was aching desperately.

"Dana," he pleaded, "tell me what it is that I feel."

After a moment she answered him in a soft voice; the strange Eastern voice he had come to know.

"So you will war once more for her soul, you two. And then—"

"Then what? Who will war?"

She did not answer. Tanner sat opposite eating listlessly. The vessel rolled more violently now. The creaking of the berth was plainly audible. In the cabin where the lamp burned steadily there was intense silence.

Over his food Tanner saw things indistinctly. Despite his will everything grew obscurely different. He watched them intently. Thoughts of his own grew less coherent. Then suddenly he started. Staring wide-eyed he caught his breath.

"Dana!" he cried, agonizingly. "Dana."

His hand went out to her in pleading. She reached hers toward him. They met in a tight clasp. Both turned toward the dragon.

A long time passed. Before their eyes the articles of the room danced in a whirl of vaguenesses.

Suddenly he stood erect, laughing heartily. She smiled up at him, her eyes closed save for a narrow, brilliant slit. Her black hair fell half over her face. He shook her hand playfully, then in a rush everything went black. Oblivion swallowed him.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE PAST.

IN the cabin of the Black Dragon a great bronze lamp, carved with elaborate artistry and set with precious stones, swayed gently. Its rare violet light shed a strangely subtle perfume through the room. Where the rays fell on the teakwood table delicate patterns of inlaid onyx and jade spoke tangibly of the owner's high-born estate.

Against the wall to the right of the door stood a great mahogany case. Its shelves were heaped with rare old parchments, all neatly arranged and bound in heavy leather studded with jewels. The deep luxury of the berth was finely colored with beautiful silks, while a rustling silk curtain orna-

mented with gold embroidery, swayed around it.

On the left wall a great lustrous silken tapestry hung, woven cunningly to picture a dragon, black as jet save for a thin gold edge around each scale, who looked out upon the room with red eyes through which a greenish gold thread was strangely spun.

Before the symbol of his god Yahn Tsiung Lee, who was Tanner, prayed. He was a superb specimen of manhood and the dark skin which had marked him from youth was smooth and fine. His deep almond eyes were brilliant with feeling which played in their depth in ever-varying quality.

His strong, clasped hands glittered with diamonds. He was clad in wondrous spun silks, thick and delicate, and his wrists and collar were heavily worked in gold, while the deep, soft shade of his tunic was soothing to the eye. Even as he prayed one saw that he was an athlete, supple and strong.

Beside him knelt Dana, now Latiea, the princess, fairest of China's women.

Yahn was listening to the warm color of her voice as she prayed aloud. His glance stole to her ivory face so richly colored in lip and eyes. Such a mouth as she had! Roses of passion bloomed upon her lips. Her black curls fell over white-clad shoulders like a shower of rich perfume.

The curve of her throat was delicately strong, and the ripe fulness of youth heaved in her swelling breasts. Her hands, too, were jeweled, diamonds upon fine slender hands so warm in their passion for him.

"Oh, Master of Life," she prayed, her ardent tone rising in melodious supplication, "grant Yahn his prayer. Give it to us, oh Mighty One, to the full of the wine of love. Let not lips of lovers ever tire or the hunger of lover's hearts ever cease. I beseech you give it to Yahn to love and love with the freedom of great-hearted passion. Make me not unable to answer his will, for I am his woman, his all."

They bowed in silent worship a moment, then hand in hand they rose and crossed to the table.

Drawing up a great chair inlaid with ivory and jewels, Yahn drew his Latiea

down beside him tenderly. His strong hand stroked her slender one with timid courage.

"Ah, my own, it has been deep red, this day of victory."

Her eyes were stars of passion burning full for him.

"The blood of the guardians of Latiea will wash clean the sin of her theft. The dragon will bless Yahn, my beloved."

"Wild was the tumult, but wilder still with desire I knew no peace till your lips were the cooling fire I drank in triumph."

"And Afoon—are you sure he will abandon his dream?"

"Is he not under the command of Yahn? Who has given him bread and the rare chance to do brave deeds? He is my friend, my follower."

She laughed, tenderly stroking his cheek the while.

"Heart that has conquered my heart, is the face of Latiea so soon forgotten by one whose mouth yearned to drink kisses?"

He joined in her laugh, making merry with her bright eyes.

"Even the heart of my passionate pure one knows vanity."

"I know love, and it teaches me fear for my lover."

He leaned toward her, his eyes growing wild with desire. She saw, and her own expressive orbs were glories of love. With a sigh half fainting in its fierce yielding she swayed to his lips. Gripped in sheer agony of desire, they clung lip to lip, as though fearful of parting.

"I have stolen the blossom of China's great throne, and the wrath of the fathers may fall; but I love her."

"She is but breath to her Yahn, a word he has spoken in dream."

"A pirate chieftain has done ill to presume in such fashion."

"The dragon loves courage and passion in Yahn. Is he not always victor? Who reads with more wisdom or speaks with more poetry?"

"Love blinds even a princess to the weakness of her adored one."

"I have offered my life to the dragon. My virtue is his and my prayer. Does not love as we know it become worship?"

He threw back his great leonine head in a

gesture of reckless defiance. "Away with fear of the gods. I am Yahn and I love. Let him who is weak deny his passion. Yahn takes what he wants from whoever has."

"Ah, now speaks my captain of great adventures and high powers."

"And now speaks his love, and his mate."

The door of the cabin opened and a Chinaman stood on the threshold. He was clad as a seaman and his wicked eyes blazed.

"In a certain house in Hong-Kong it is said the black dragon knows a master who can brook no denying." His words were slowly spoken.

"True, Afoon." Yahn did not move. Latiea watched narrowly.

"Then let him beware of the wrath of the dragon."

"What knows Afoon of the power he invokes?"

The man laughed villainously. "He has dreamed of a wife who should sail as a queen."

"Afoon," Yahn's voice rumbled ominously, "let not the spirit of folly sway the brain of my friend with useless desires."

"Who says they are useless?"

"Yahn."

The great man rose with tigerlike speed. Latiea sat silently watching.

"Then by his word let him stand if he dares. Turn the tapestry and sail to the Spice Isles with the yellow dragon watching your love."

"Yahn!" Latiea sprang up. "Do not heed him. Oh, be not rashly tempted. Even Yahn dares not defy his luck god."

"Afoon," the captain's eyes burned, "we have long been friends and you served in a riot of life under me. Your passion has stolen your brain, but, for the love that I bear you, I will prove that your yellow dragon favors my winning Latiea, princess of our land."

"If you do we are lost, oh, my own." She was on her knees before him. Stopping, he lifted her with proud love in his face.

"If we reach the Spice Island you will be content?" He faced Afoon.

"To serve as a dog in Yahn's vessel forever," Afoon smiled.

Deftly Yahn turned the tapestry. The yellow dragon stared from his green eyes streaked with red. The vessel moved into the night. Hands trembled over her eyes, and Latiea sobbed in the chair.

"This night, oh beloved, you have sealed our love's doom." Silence fell in the cabin while the yellow dragon shone in the violet light. The great voyage was begun. Yahn smiled defiantly, daring the sea. The Chinaman turned with a harsh laugh.

CHAPTER VI.

SHIPWRECK.

AT dawn the pale light rose out of a gray oiled sea. A shrieking gale swept the vessel off through the foam-capped rollers.

In the cabin Yahn stood beside the deep berth looking down upon the flowerlike face of Latiea. Her eyes opened wonderingly.

"Yahn," she murmured, "is the yellow dragon still there?"

"Still, my beloved, and the luck of Yahn holds."

Her lips curved in gracious tenderness. Her arms rose toward him.

He felt his heart swell as he saw their delicate beauty.

"Ah, is the dawn so gray for envy of my love?"

"The black clouds are as Yahn's dragon to-day. When he hides his god the sky creates new ones."

He bent over her, his deep eyes alight. "Latiea, who is there who can speak the sum of my love?"

"Yahn," she answered, letting her arms fall around his neck. "Nay, Yahn is without voice. The desire is as silence, unfathomed."

Their lips met in a rapture of love. Then, as a knock sounded at the door, Yahn rose.

"Who knocks?"

"Afoon would seek advice."

"Speak, then, I am listening."

"Would it not be best to shorten sail? The gale blows desperately."

Yahn glanced at the yellow dragon tapestried on the wall.

"Put on more sail. I am eager to make the Spice Islands. Does the wind not blow to be used?"

They heard Afoon going from the door. Yahn turned again to Latiea. "To-night we laugh at Afoon's yellow god in the jeweled harbor of the Spice Island."

"May the words of Yahn be true." An infinite pathos spoke in her voice. Her eyes glistened with tears.

"I am afraid, Yahn, the sea speaks of danger. My heart is oppressed with fears."

He laughed defiantly, standing erect despite the jerking lunge of his ship. "I am child of the sea and her master."

Sitting at the table he watched Latiea dress. His keen eyes were warm with joy in her beauty.

"The form of Latiea is the morning. Her beauty is as the dawn."

Her laughter was happy, though she turned away to hide embarrassment.

"Even the nightingale envies her voice in laughter."

"My pirate speaks as a poet among his roses."

"There is no poet who can tell of the true beauty of Latiea."

She came to his side, moving with alert grace.

"Ah, the desire of love is but heightened by union of lovers."

He caught her to his breast, smothering her rosebud mouth with kisses. The vessel rolled more desperately. Overhead, the sails boomed like crackling thunder under the driving wind.

All day the lovers talked of their joy, though there were times when the girl's face grew shadowed as she glanced at the yellow dragon. Night came. Afoon called Yahn on deck.

He was plunged in a swirl of hissing water that swept the vessel from bow to stern. His great laugh was boyishly eager. "Ha, old mother," he challenged the sea, "you are too boisterous at play. Know you not, Latiea rides the Black Dragon to-night?"

Among his men he worked, making fast

the rigging. They were sullen, and he heard grumbling among them as they toiled.

"What has turned the peace of my crew to anger?"

"We sailed under the guard of the black dragon on the wall. Who is the man who dares turn him away for a yellow god of Afoon?"

Yahn stood among them, eyes blazing with wrath.

"Has not the crew of Yahn Tsing Lee been made rich with spoil? Has not his ship sailed storm-mad seas? Who among you is a friend to fear?"

They made no answer, but their glances were evil. Yahn turned to his cabin with a harsh laugh.

"Let any who is tired of my law speak, and he leaves me at the Spice Island to-night."

The men shifted uneasily, then a great brute of a seaman laughed.

"We will see no Spice Island this night."

Yahn turned on him like a tiger.

"Dawn finds us safe in the jeweled harbor and at peace. There you shall end your time."

The giant turned away muttering.

For two hours they worked like demons. Increasingly heavy seas pounded aboard the ship. The night was ink black. Only the skill of his crew could have waged such war. The vessel staggered under reeling sail. Again and again the course was lost to be regained by Yahn, who held the wheel down with Titan arms.

Then through the night a wild cry rose. At the same time the ponderous crash of storm-mad breakers shook the dense darkness. Yahn sprang to his cabin door. It was fastened against him.

The vessel plunged in a spinning abandon. The sailors shouted. Heedless of the wheel, Yahn threw himself against the door. Under the impact of his great shoulder it broke.

He leaped inside. Latiea crouched terror-stricken in the far corner, her hands uplifted. Above her, his yellow face mad with passion, eyes burning with desire, Afoon towered.

Latiea screamed as his hand closed on her wrist. The yellow dragon tapestry writhed

venomously, its red eyes wickedly gleaming in the violet light. Yahn sprang upon his mate.

Afoon was an agile man and strong. The two fought desperately for the freedom of life and Latiea. Over the cabin, now knee-deep in an inrush of water, they lunged. Their fierce eyes blazed hate.

At last Yahn got his mate's throat in his viselike hands. The great body of Afoon quivered, grew tense and crumpled. With a grunt of disgust the pirate chieftain flung him into the black heave of water that rolled back from the door.

"Latiea, my rose of China, where are you?"

He turned to catch her in his love-fearful arms. Her eyes were alight with passion.

"We will ride the mad sea to our heart's desire."

"Who knows the way, Yahn, to the gate of fulfilment?"

"Only the magnolia flower has power to still the heart of love."

Their lips met; then came a grinding crash. The cabin floor buckled under them. A great roar filled their ears. Still clinging to Latiea, Yahn felt himself go down in a frenzy of raging water. When he came up she was clinging about his neck; her cry reached him above the chaos of the storm.

"We shall never sleep in the harbor of jeweled delight."

He made no answer. With set teeth he began swimming. Hours passed in that wild battle in the black sea of wrath. Fainter and fainter became his stroke, then at last, in a gasping cry of despair, he closed the unconscious form of Latiea in his arms and went down. Oblivion swallowed him.

Under a plain bronze lamp swaying violently in the cabin of that Black Dragon a common board table glowed dully. A case full of books rocked in its place against the wall. Opposite a tapestry hung, on which a yellow dragon woven in rare silk writhed venomously in the vessel's crazy lurching.

Tanner lifted his aching head from the table. His eyes burned, while in his mouth

a strange taste lingered. His brain reeled with memories of a mad dream just ended; then the yellow dragon met his eyes. His last memory had been of a black dragon and Dana.

With an exclamation of alarm, still under the spell of a wild dream, he sprang across the room and turned the tapestry. The black dragon looked out at him once more from reddish eyes shot with a strange line of greenish gold.

He turned, warned by some intangible sense.

She was lying upon the berth, her black hair falling in a sheen across the pillow. Why had he no remembrance of her being there? Her face was drawn and white, while tears still shone on her closed lashes.

He stepped toward her, then from his crouching posture beside the berth Huang rose ominously, his eyes aflame with mad desire. Tanner met his glance and it was evident that the Chinaman was frenzied with drink.

"You fool," the Oriental crooned. "She is mine, white though she be."

Tanner did not answer; only a short laugh shook him as he leaped.

They met and swayed desperately under the impact of fighting muscles. The ship lurched, jerked and reeled; above the noise of their battle a chaotic thunder roared. Desperately Tanner struggled for the Chinaman's throat. He had a strangely confident sense of familiarity. The man was agile and strong, and Tanner felt his lithe body twisting free. In a last supreme effort he gripped Huang's throat in his iron hands.

They writhed nearer the door. It burst open and a demoniac riot of hissing water surged knee-deep into the cabin in a deafening uproar of wind and water.

Tanner felt Huang stiffen; then the body of the Chinaman became limp. With a grunt of disgust he flung the body into the black torrent raging beyond the door.

"Dana," he shouted, turning, "where are you?"

She was sitting up in bed staring at him and at the black dragon tapestry swinging perilously on the wall.

"The ship is lost, Dana—look at the water!"

She sprang to her feet with a heart-breaking cry. "Again, must we go down in this sea?"

He felt the words with shivering force, then his face grew tense. "No, hy Heaven," he said, "we will not."

A grinding shock tore the monotonous tumult of breakers with a sharper sound. The vessel buckled under them. He caught Dana in his arms, then over their heads a frenzied chaos of water closed. When he came up Dana was clinging about his neck. He took her arms and tore her free.

"Dana," he shouted into her ear, "if you hold me that way we drown. Put your hands on my shoulders and don't grip me too tightly."

She obeyed, her face like a drawn white flower before his eyes. Without a word he began swimming.

Hours passed. Feehler grew his stroke.

At last he felt that he could go no farther; then the sea caught him and swept him up. With a cry Dana gripped his shoulders. They were rolled over and over, dragged along a sandy beach, and dashed safely up beyond the reach of the water.

"Dana," he shouted, "we are safe this time."

She laughed deliriously and sank unconscious at his feet.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BLACK DRAGON'S WORK.

NOT far from the point where Tanner and Dana had washed ashore stood an old temple. No one knew who had built it. A long-dead race must have reared it to their god. The tropical growth concealed yet adorned its crumbling walls with flower and vine so that it was now a sheltering arbor of riotous red blossoms whose scented petals fell in perfumed color upon the rough altar.

For years a Chinese priest had made it his hermitage. The islanders enshrined him in a mystic faith, and loved him with its assurance. To him all troubles came. His wrinkled old face, dry and yellow, was lit with smoldering eyes from which the wisdom of a village secret shone. In his sim-

ple life all things were made to seem kindly and through his advice many a troubled native had attained peace.

It was his habit to wander daily along the beach. This morning, shambling through the sand, eyes bent in meditation, he came upon two white hodies. Without excitement the old man bent over them. As he studied their faces his lips curved in a strange smile.

"Fate," he muttered, "the glorious ancestor has seen fit to use me."

His eyes filled with a dreamy haze. With infinite care he set to work over the girl, who at last opened her eyes. Their cloudy blue depths were oddly veiled with wonder. The old man smiled amiably.

"So you came out of the sea," he murmured. "Life will go on."

A look of fear crossed the girl's face, but the priest had turned to Tanner. She watched him chafing the strong arms now lying limp in a gesture of exhaustion.

After an interminable time the American opened his eyes. They were full of the same vague questioning that haunted those of the girl. The priest nodded as though confirming some idea.

"Dana," Tanner muttered, seeking her with his vacant glance, "where are you? That rascal has drugged us. Where are we?"

At first her moving lips emitted no sound, then as she struggled to a sitting position her voice came gropingly.

"The black dragon is gone—gone forever into the sea. We are alive. Oh, mighty silence, we have escaped."

The priest stooped to lift her to her feet. His manner was reverent.

"The black dragon," he crooned softly, "lives always, on land and sea." With his support the girl stood tottering while Tanner rose.

"You will need rest and food," the old man continued, "and help in your hour of thought. Come to my altar."

Silently, as though afraid to speak, they walked beside him. Neither glanced toward the other. Some powerful conviction, a feeling of fear lest their eyes betray a dreadful truth, kept them awkwardly staring at the ground.

The priest supported their faltering steps as they entered the forest beyond the beach. In silence they came to the altar and sat down.

Without a word the Chinaman set about preparing food. Tanner watched him with indifferent eyes. It seemed to him that he must speak, yet his tongue refused to utter the words crowding his brain.

Dana moved restlessly. Their eyes met. A swift darting look of inquiry passed between them. As though to deny its implication, Tanner shook his head.

"Dana," he said, "are you feeling better?"

She nodded, letting her lids hide the warmth that came in her eyes.

"We had a hard pull of it there in the water." He spoke hesitatingly. She did not answer. In desperation he drew his will taut.

"That villain Huang," he asserted more vehemently than the statement required, "must have drugged our food. He brought it to us, you know."

"Then you do remember—everything?" She did not look at him. Her voice was timid, fearful, yet toned with joy.

"Yes, that is the queer part of it. I do."

"It is all incredible."

"It is. Still, there is a drug in China that can do that. One always remembers the dreams it stimulates."

"I know," she whispered, "the older Chinese used to make it of—of magnolia blossoms." Her voice fell at the mention of the flower.

"Huang put it in our dinner that last meal, Dana. There can be no other explanation. You agree, don't you?" His appeal was almost pathetic.

"Yes," she said after a pause. "What else could it be?"

The priest came to them then, his inscrutable smile lit with kindness. "Here is rice," he said, "eat first, then talk, if you choose."

While they ate he sat before his idol, staring fixedly up at the grim face. His own features became rigid and grotesque. As they finished, he spoke. Without preliminary he began an odd chant. They listened, their faces expressive of surprise.

"In the days of long ago," he began crooning, "the black dragon lived among men. He was the guardian friend of mighty men."

Tanner stole a glance at Dana. Her lids were closed.

The priest moved swiftly. From a pouch he poured violet powder upon the altar. Then, as Tanner stared, he produced a minute black dragon, carved from a block of jade. It was a delicately formed miniature of the tapestry Tanner knew so well. The priest smiled, placing the dragon at the back of the altar. Still crooning a chant he set fire to the powder. A soft, subtly suggestive perfume pervaded the air.

The old man's hands were moving rhythmically to his chant. As the powder burned Tanner became drowsy. He strove in vain to resist the languor. His lids drooped. He sank forward, then suddenly became erect. His open eyes were startlingly brilliant. Opposite him Dana was opening her eyes, the same splendor lighting them.

Above their heads the blue smoke from the powder spread thinly. As they watched it seemed to curve downward around them. They did not speak, nor was there wonder as they watched. Slowly a blue hemisphere, a miniature sky enclosed them. The world was shut away beyond that film of hollow blue.

Their eyes turned simultaneously toward the priest. He crouched before the altar singing a low, wild melody. When they saw the altar their glances stayed. Instinctively their hands went out and clasped. The priest ceased his song.

Quite without will the eyes of Tanner and Dana remained fixed upon the dragon. A long pause followed the priest's chant, then as he began again the mouth of the dragon opened. From it came tiny figures that began enacting a double drama upon the altar. The priest began a low, sweet melody which changed to a rapid narrative.

The figures on the altar gathered in two groups, each surrounded by its own scenery. Tanner saw himself as a boy in his old home portrayed by one group, while the other enacted a strange play in some scented garden of China.

The play continued till Tanner was escorted aboard the Black Dragon. Then the two groups drew nearer. Their scenes blended into one, and side by side the story of Yahn Tsing Lee was portrayed with that of Tanner and Dana, while the priest told the old Chinese tale.

Breathless, the watchers listened. Their hands gripped tightly. The story and the strange drama ended simultaneously. Silence swelled the blue hemisphere till it broke. The outer world became visible and the priest, still smiling, stole behind his idol.

Dana's grip relaxed. Tanner turned toward her swiftly. Her eyes were wet with tears and shone with a vivid light of love.

"Dana," he cried tempestuously. "what is all this?"

"I cannot explain." Her voice was liquid. Tanner felt drawn to her.

"The story he told—the play there on the altar—what does it mean?"

From behind the idol the priest's voice answered: "Out of the mouth of the black dragon, keeper of spirits, in time came the great gift of life to lovers. It ended too soon, and the great silence, the black dragon, has given the life again."

He was gone. They saw him vanish among the vines beyond the temple.

"It is impossible!" Tanner shook himself vigorously.

"Yes," she answered, "and yet, I knew the story of Yahn. It is an old, old tale."

"But we are white and Aryans of modern time."

"I know. It is so difficult to understand."

"He burned something. Was it the drug of magnolia?"

"I don't know." She was silent a minute, then, "Does it matter?" Her voice was passionately tender. Her eyes burned as they met his.

"Dana." He held out trembling arms to her. She came with a suppressed cry of joy. Their lips met in a long, wild kiss. From the great overhanging blossoms a shower of crimson petals sprinkled her black hair. They laughed like happy children.

"If Huang did drug us," he said softly, "and I still believe he did, I am certainly grateful. His drug taught us love."

Her lips sought his as she answered: "And the black dragon gave us life to make glorious with the knowledge. Oh, I am so happy."

He drew her close, whispering passionate endearments. "Yes," he said, "and we are beginning to-day, my princess."

(The end.)

VOICES

BY DIXIE WILLSON

WIND talks to me—comes a saying in my window
 "Long, green meadows—and the grasses blowing blue—
 Little paths a trailing from the morning to the evening"—
 Wind—a blowing back again a dream of days with you.

Dusk, like a voice, comes to whisper all the memories—
 Rose-warm shadows, and the world a growing gray,
 Tender eyes a shining with the dreams that lived behind them—
 Dusk—a voice reminding me of heaven for a day.

Stars talk to me—come a saying thru the darkness:
 "Love lives ever—and it cannot lose its track!
 Wind and dusk and starlight speak the same the wide world over"—
 Some day he will hear them, too—and bring my heaven back!

The Frigate Bird

by Lee Bolt

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

JOHN AXSON, a young man of extraordinary strength of both body and mind, but exceedingly ugly, had been taken from his tenement home and his tubercular mother and his thieving father, as a little child, and trained and educated at the expense of James Gordon Windsor 3rd.

Windsor had sent for Axson, and for the first time in his life he looked upon the face of the man to whom he owed a debt of gratitude which hurt him like hot iron. Windsor explained that he had reached the end of his financial string, and was soon to cross the border. No Windsor had ever worked, and his son, James, had been bred in the tradition of wealth and culture. But he had selected and educated Axson to supply his son with funds to continue to live in the style to which he had been accustomed. When James Gordon Windsor 4th made a profitable marriage the connection could be terminated. His benefactor explained to Axson that under the circumstances of his birth he would certainly have become a thief, and he had merely provided that he could steal with security. However, just as he himself could never knowingly have lived on stolen goods, so neither could his son. He bound Axson never to reveal to young Windsor the source of his income. But the old man desired that the two lads should live together after his death. Young Windsor, a typical spendthrift of the city, harmless and good-natured, was both attracted and repulsed by Axson. However, they made a *ménage* together, and Axson was at once confronted with Windsor's need of money after his father's self-inflicted death.

Having proved his physical prowess in a boxing bout with Windsor, the latter was immensely attracted to Axson, and Axson in turn, for the first time in his life, was brought within the radius of human companionship and human friendship. Axson had to plunder, but he would plunder for the sake of another.

Regaining consciousness, Windsor reached his locker and there found a note from Axson saying he would be at the flat the next day with the money for the Leflingwell debt.

On the strength of a newspaper account of the McIntosh diamond robbery, Axson went to call at the shop of Ainsmith & Faulkner, from whose safe the gems had been stolen. The robbers had left a note signed with the mysterious signature of the XXX, the sign manual of a famous gang of thieves who, for five years, had operated without a single member falling into the clutches of the law.

The same evening Axson called at a quiet house on Fifty-Seventh Street, where he had an interview with three men, Volner, Norton, and Louis Masters. Nonplused at his demands, they nevertheless complied by handing over forty thousand dollars in cash for the McIntosh diamonds, which he gave them. Before their wonder ceased, Gordon, their confidential man, was brought in, bloody and hattered.

When Windsor became anxious over his financial state, Axson advised him to go in for an heiress, promising him twenty thousand dollars for his campaign. He also advised Bacon, their new butler, that his picture was kept at the Rogues' Gallery, that he came from Volner, and carried a gun. He got Bacon's promise to be his man.

After three days absence, Windsor came to Axson and reported he had fallen desperately in love with Elizabeth Dorn. He could not press his suit because her engagement to a brilliant young man of leisure, Louis Masters, was to be announced in three hours. Mrs. Dorn had been engaged to young Masters's father, but had dropped him because he had come to the house intoxicated. All Dorn women bated drink. After his father's death, young Masters had been at home in the Dorn household, and this engagement would consummate Mrs. Dorn's lifetime ambition. The young man was crazy about the girl, but she was still indifferent to all men. Her emotions had never been aroused. Axson assured Windsor in three hours society would know the private engagement of Louis Masters and Elizabeth had been broken.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for May 29.

Axson went at once to Masters's apartment. After drugging the man with whiskey they started for the Dorn place on Long Island. Arrived there, Axson sent his man into the house and then hid in a kind of grotto. While watching the house, a door opened into the grotto and Axson encountered a beautiful young woman, whom he felt had, at the same time as she entered his dark retreat, opened for the first time a door inside his soul.

Axson spoke to the woman and calmed her fears, though he confessed he was a fugitive. She wrought so upon him that he secured her promise that he might come again, in the night, and speak to her.

Then he returned to the apartment, where Windsor found him on his return from the Dorn ball. He gave Axson a graphic account of the evening's sensation when Masters walked into the rooms and announced to Mrs. Dorn he was repaying his father's debt by breaking his engagement with Elizabeth. Later, he said, he had danced with Elizabeth, and she seemed strangely interested in criminology.

Masters sought sanctuary in the house of Martha Perce, whom he tried to convince he had broken with the Dorns to resume his old partnership with her. He explained his burning passion for Axson's death and asked the woman's aid. His intensity of hatred led the woman to think the Dorn girl was in some way mixed up with Axson.

Windsor, in a wild intoxication of summer madness, had proposed to Elizabeth and then got his dismissal. Axson urged him to write a letter, and himself composed the document. Windsor was loath to use another man's burning words to persuade her, and called it stolen fire, but in the end was persuaded.

In the middle of the night Axson woke to find a person in his room. The light disclosed a woman in a mask bending over the foot of his bed with a gun in her hand. Axson guessed she had been sent by Masters, but he could not guess the tale the woman told was acting to arouse his sympathies. Martha Perce got him to confess he was moved to pity for the first time in his life. He promised to aid her at any risk. "I am a fool," said Axson deliberately, "who had room in his heart for only one dream, and when that was gone, he was willing to throw his heart away after it."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SPIDER.

A LITTLE later, Martha Perce hurried up the steps to her own house; she knew that Louis Masters waited inside for her, her eyes on fire. At the thought, her cheeks flamed in turn. She paused at the door to rub busily with a handkerchief on her cheeks, and rearrange her hair with swift, dexterous pats. Then she unlocked the door and entered and went straight into the living-room.

There she found Masters standing bolt-upright in the center of the room, his face livid white, his hands clenched at his sides. The fire which had been blazing merrily when she left the house earlier in the evening was now a heap of cold embers. She knew in an instant that the man had sat there with his hopes and fears all the evening, waiting, dreading. He had heard her key in the front door; now he stood before her with his heart in his throat, waiting. She would not leave him in that deadly suspense.

"Sit down; take it easy, Louis," she said, "I've won. I played your game and he's mine!"

The color came slowly up in his face. Perspiration burst out upon his forehead,

gleaming. The tensed muscles relaxed. He sighed, he smiled. It was like an awakening of the dead.

"Martha," he said huskily, "you are wonderful—divine!"

"Divine or demoniac," she answered gloomily, throwing off her coat. "Start up the fire, Louis. My blood's cool—my heart's cold. It's been a rotten night, Louis, rotten!"

He obeyed her without a word. He was whistling as he piled up the tinder. And the eyes of Martha Perce blazed with scorn and then with tenderness as she looked down upon him. At last he was through. The flame rose high. He placed her chair close to the fire and then stood behind it, while she spread out her trembling hands toward the warmth.

"Now," he said at length, since she volunteered no information, "what happened?"

"I got an idea, Louis," she said calmly, "that we're sending to hell a man that's worth both of us rolled into one. Yes, the two of us—the whole Three X!"

"Very likely," chuckled Masters. "But what happened, Martha?"

"Just the way we planned it," said the girl. "You said no matter how I came at him, I couldn't take him by surprise.

Well, I didn't believe you. I framed the place, and went into it like a leaf on the wind. He couldn't possibly have heard me. Not *possibly*, understand? And he was sound asleep. I could tell that when I entered by the sound of his breathing.

"So I soft-shoed it across the floor with my gat ready. I'd made up my mind, Louis, to get him with the gat."

"Good girl!" murmured Masters, and patted her shoulder.

She shook off his hand, and then reached up swiftly and caught it in a convulsive clasp.

"Pretty soon his breathing stopped. That should have warned me, you'd say. But I tell you, Louis, there hadn't been a sound. Not a creak of the door—not a whisper of the carpet under my foot—not even the stir of my dress. I'd gone forward an inch at a time.

"And there was no noise from the bed. I went on. My hand touched the foot of the bed. I crouched and got the flash ready to take a peek. One glimpse of him and the gat would do the talking. You know I never miss.

"And just then there was a snap—the room flooded with light—I whirled and found myself looking into a big forty-five.

"Cold? Good Heavens, Louis, this fire can't take the chill of it out of my blood!

"And the face behind the gun nearly finished me, when I got a good look at it. You told me he was ugly. But I didn't expect to meet a mask of the devil!

"He was perfectly calm about it. You'd have thought that it was the most ordinary thing for him to meet a hurglar in his room at night. He made me sit down.

"I had not a ghost of a hope that our cock-and-bull story would work on him. To tell you the truth, Louis, I'm sure that under ordinary conditions those unmerciful eyes of his would have looked straight through me and that silly story about 'Glad' and 'Larry.' But he's been upset recently by something. I think the poor devil is tortured in some way. At any rate, he was blind to me the minute he found out—or thought he found out—that I was suffering. Yes, Louis, I felt as if I were talking with a machine—an invincible ma-

chine—when I first saw him. But then I tried that down-and-out gag, and it worked perfectly. Oh, he was cautious at first, but in a moment or so he wasn't trying to see through me. He was taking every word I said for full measure. I tell you, he was easier than any fool you'd pick off the street. For a strong man, Louis, when he begins to weaken, goes with a smash.

"Well, I told him the whole story of Larry and Glad just as you planned it for me. You're a clever demon, Louis, and you guessed at his weak spot. Before I was through he was mine. I knew it. It was like working with a child. And when I finished he offered to go with me to the Hole-in-the-Wall. Any time within a week—that's the limit for Larry, you know—he'll be ready to go when I call him. Can you beat that?"

"Within a week!" repeated Masters. "Martha, you *are* divine. Within a week! To-morrow, then—to-morrow!"

"When you talk like that, Louis," she cried, starting up and facing him, "you send a chill down my back. Now listen to me; if we go another inch ahead with this thing you've got to change your terms. I'll lead Axson to you—right into the Hole-in-the-Wall, but once he's there you've got to stay inside the limit!"

"Are you welching on me?" snarled Masters, and he drew hack a little. "Did you fall in love with his damned ugly face?"

"You can do what you like to him," she said, "but after you're through he's got to be alive—and in shape to come back to his old self."

There was a pause during which their eyes fought.

"Is that final?" he asked in a low voice at length.

"Absolutely!"

She went on hastily: "Louis, he's doing this out of pity for me. Think of it—*pity!* The poor fool!"

"The fool!" rejoined Masters. "Very well, you have it your own way. Get him to the Hole-in-the-Wall and I'll stay inside my limit."

"That's straight?" she asked suspiciously.

"It is."

"Louis," she murmured, "are you very angry with me?"

He seemed to gather himself for an effort. Then he caught her into his arms with a laugh.

"Angry? I'm more in love with you, Martha, than I've ever been!"

"And how much is that?" she cried. "Oh, Louis Masters, you yellow-eyed devil, how much can I believe you?"

She broke away, flushed—with dancing eyes.

"There's more business left," she said. "We'll finish that first."

"Good," muttered Masters with a sigh that may have been relief. "What is it?"

"Who do I work with in the Hole-in-the-Wall?"

"There's only one man I trust. That's Billy Clune."

"That ugly devil—One-Eyed Clune?"

"That same ugly devil!"

"But when he's not full of dope he's as tricky as they make them."

"He's tricky in some things," said Masters, "but I can trust him for this. Because, Martha, when I tell him what I intend to do, Billy would rather be there to help than any place else in the world."

"And what *will* you do?" she said with a shudder.

"The finer points, my dear," said the master criminal, smiling, "you must leave to your imagination. When I'm through with him he'll still be—alive."

She clapped a hand across her eyes as if she were shutting out the thought.

"Very well, then, I'll work with Clune. But will he listen to me?"

"I'll see him first and whisper my plan in his ear. Then he'll be willing to go to hell to push it through. I tell you, Martha, that sallow-faced demon lives for the sake of giving pain."

"He's as ugly as Axson," nodded the girl, "but Axson is a clean ugly. Clune is the kind of ugly that—well, he makes me think of a poisonous spider, with his long, crooked legs and his greasy skin and death's-head."

"In a way," said Masters, "I suppose he is. The vilest of the vile—the lowest of the low. But he has his uses. You've no

idea how much the Three X has used the old reprobate!"

"A record for pride!" she said sarcastically.

"A record of necessity," answered Masters.

"What's his past?"

"I don't know. No one knows. He's one of those men who seem to have been born to crime and who are raised to it. It's in his blood. He naturally does the crooked thing. He lives by hate. He is a spider, Martha. He lives on life-blood. I understand that in the old days he used to be a common dip, but that was long ago. His hand grew too unsteady.

"They say that he was once a common moll-buzzer. But as years went on he had to give that up. He took to worse crimes. Now there isn't a capital crime on the calendar, I'll wager, that Billy Clune hasn't been guilty of."

"What's his real name?"

"I don't think even God knows that. If he does, you can rest assured that He's ashamed of the knowledge. But after all, Billy is the man for me. If he doesn't suit you, tell me so and I'll find another. In the meantime I'll send for Billy, and after I'm through with him you can see him in the Hole-in-the-Wall."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VICTORY.

IT was two days later that Windsor dashed into the room of Axson late in the morning. The somber giant had been out late the night before and in a direction of which he would not, as usual, say the slightest word to Windsor. Whatever his adventure, however, it left him stolid, grim, and phlegmatic. He had been sitting passively before the window all morning staring out at the sky. Twice before, Windsor had striven to rouse him. Each time he had signally failed. But now he came with a fresh determination and actually shook the shoulder of the colossus.

"The telephone!" cried Windsor. "She has just telephoned! She's read the letter—my letter—your letter—our letter! She

got it yesterday. She wants me to come to see her! Victory, Axson. Damn it, wake up!"

"I wish you happiness," said the other mechanically, and returned to his endless examination of the pale blue sky.

But Windsor would not have his spirits dashed. He left the room singing, with an idle farewell to Axson, dressed with bappy speed, and started at once for the Long Island House of Dorn.

It was one of those hazy, lazy days, warm, with just enough stir to the wind to make one conscious of the presence of the air. A faint mist lay streaked at random along the hillsides; the macadam flashed and glittered as the automobile sped up the winding roads. There was a sense everywhere of the growing grass—of green, living things. As they swept into the more open district cattle browsed here and there. Cows swung up their heads and looked lazily at the whirring machine; at the toot of its horn a colt kicked up its heels and raced wantonly over a hill and disappeared on the farther side with tossing tail.

Every breath was a breath of contentment, excitement, for Windsor. And yet the road, the air, the hillsides, were not half as real to him as the memory of her voice over the telephone. If she had written in reply to his note it would have been triumph enough. But for her to telephone—it was more than success—it was conquest. It flashed to his mind how much he owed to the man who had written his letter for him, and the picture of that stolid figure at the window recurred to him. But only for an instant. He dismissed the thought of Axson as we all are apt to dismiss the thoughts which puzzle us.

But beautiful as the day was, it seemed suddenly exalted to a higher atmosphere when the machine whirled smoothly through the gate of the bouse of Dorn and wound up the long road. Here the sea tempered the air with coolness and added a subtle and keen stimulus of salt. One breath of that changed air suggested the openness of ocean voyages, the prospects of foreign cities, adventure, hope, life!

Was it a wonder that the heart of James Gordon Windsor sang within him when he

waited in the reception-room for the coming of Elizabeth Dorn?

Coming, she paused an instant at the door of the big apartment to locate him and then she came with outstretched hand. He had a sensation of brightness coming toward him, of solid light, if there were such a thing. He could not find the thing that was changed about her. Certainly it was not that her face was altered, though she had grown suddenly a thousandfold more beautiful. It was like the change from the statue to life. Her smile had a meaning now that made him dizzy. Her eyes seemed to be opened—wide—admitting him. It was like the change from the bud to the flower. A few days before that beauty had been hulled in green. Now the full blossom flared out before him. The perfume went through his blood like wine.

He had risen in that daze. He took her hand. She spoke; he answered. He hardly knew what either of them said. Then they were sitting down. She was facing him, still with that faint half smile of happiness and welcome. And the sense of change was tremendous now. It seemed not like Elizabeth Dorn. The body was the same. The spirit was the spirit of a stranger.

"I've done a hold thing—telephoning to you," she was saying. "You don't think the less of me for it?"

He murmured something; his senses were only gradually clearing.

"I'm sure you don't," she smiled, "because you were bold yourself. I have finished reading your letter again for the twentieth time. I'm perfectly frank about it, you see. It seems to me a very wonderful letter. It made clear to me that—accident—in the garden which we've agreed to forget."

"Forget?" he echoed.

"After your letter that's hardly possible, is it? Then I'll be franker still. Your letter made it seem more possible; explained it. Will you let me tell you just why I have sent for you?"

"Will it trouble you?"

"Not in the least. I want to!"

Her eyes were so clear, so frank, so curious upon him, that he was disturbed. Something had shaken her, indeed, but had not

carried her off her feet. There was a great deal of hard work still lying before him. He saw that.

"First, I'd like to try to explain something about myself—something about all girls, I suppose. Or do you already know a great deal about them?"

"I feel," said Windsor, earnestly, "as if I knew nothing."

She laughed softly.

"This is the thing I'd like to explain. It's very intimate, but we've started on such an intimate footing that I suppose we may as well keep on, don't you think?"

"We really can hardly avoid it, can we?"

"I think not. The thing I want to explain is this: we all have the feeling that it is possible to meet—merely look at a person—and then care a great deal."

"Surely, it is possible!"

"But you see," she explained, "so many men take that possibility for granted that a girl has to be on her guard. She hardly ever dares to be even really friendly with a man until she has known him—oh, a very great length of time. Do you understand?"

"I know there are men like that," he said. "I won't pretend that I don't."

She studied him with a rather quizzical smile which died away and left her deadly earnest.

"There are so many of them," she said, "that I've always felt that there is no man who hasn't played at caring for some woman in his life. It was a rather horrible thing to feel, you know. It took so much of the glamour from all life. Are you smiling at me?"

"I am listening—reverently!" he said.

"And that night in the garden—I couldn't help but feel that you were like all the rest, just playing and hoping against hope that I would take you in earnest!"

"But now?"

"But after your letter—that wild and beautiful letter! I was no longer so sure. I tried to think it over calmly and make up my mind, but every time I read the letter it was impossible for me to think. I found myself taking your place and standing at your side. Yet still there was a ghost of doubt. It didn't seem possible."

"But finally you knew?"

"I did. But it was not from the letter that I got the knowledge."

"Was it another man?" asked Windsor in a hard voice, and he stared fixedly at her.

"It was."

He whitened and sat stiff in his chair.

"I should like very much to know him," said James Windsor.

She smiled again.

"There would be trouble if you met, I gather from the way you say that. And yet I, also, wish that you could meet him—as I met him."

"Will you tell me his name?"

"I wish that I could!"

"You wish?" he echoed.

"Doesn't it seem impossible that I could learn so much from a man and then not know his name?"

"Tell me only—well, how well do you know him?"

"I have met him twice."

"Good Heavens!"

"I've met you not many more times."

He was silent. Then: "Will you describe him?"

"I have never seen his face!"

He could only stare.

"But I'll tell you all I can about him, because in a strange way he made it seem possible for me to believe in you."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE AWAKENING.

"IT was only a few nights ago that I first met him," she went on. "You'll remember the night. It was the evening when Mr. Masters came to the house and did that—strange thing. I ran out; I couldn't stay inside and face people, you know."

"I went out hating all men, I think. They all seemed treacherous and mysterious; and I started into the big arbor at the side of the house where I could be alone and think things over—or stop thinking of anything at all."

"It was pitchy black in the arbor that night so that I couldn't see what was there. But something *was* there. It was a man. I won't tell you how we started talking to-

gether. He confessed at once that he was a fugitive—from the law, I think. Of course I started back for the house in a good deal of alarm at that, but something about him held me there. It was like a hand at my shoulder turning me back. So I stayed and I talked with him.

"I couldn't see him—only a vague outline. But I *felt* him in an odd way through the darkness. Do you guess what I mean?"

"He talked like an educated man; he seemed to think like a man of culture. But he was a criminal. He told me so."

"And he whined to you for sympathy?" asked Windsor.

"Whined? There was nothing sneaking or mean about him. He had been born into the criminal world, I gathered from what he said. It was inescapable for him."

"An old, old story," remarked Windsor.

"Perhaps, but he didn't tell it in an old way. He didn't ask for sympathy or advice or help. He simply seemed to be overwhelmed with gloom—sorrow. Do you know that as he talked I began to feel a tremendous sense of insignificance. A moment before I had thought myself most miserable—the most wretched person under the sky. But bearing him I decided—well, that I hadn't the capacity to feel real misery. I felt all at once that *no* woman can suffer in the mind as a man can suffer. Do you see?"

"I suppose," said Windsor coldly, "that the fellow had had long practice in rehearsing his yarn."

"I wish you wouldn't say that," she answered, with a touch of irritation. "It's possible that he was bluffing and that I am easily deceived. It's barely possible. But if you had heard that deep, strong voice as I heard it, I'm sure it would have convinced you. Think of a man without friends—without hope—followed by a sort of curse which had stayed with him since his birth!"

"Very Byronic," said Windsor easily. "But what was his object in talking with you if he had no requests to make?"

"A strange object. It seemed to make him happy merely to have me there. And I was deeply complimented to know that I could make such a man—even a thief—

happy. It stirred me terribly and in a way which I can't explain. Finally, before I went in, he promised that he might come again, always by the night, and whistle a signal which would bring me down.

"And when I went back into the house I was happy. I could lift up my head and talk to people freely. For after I had talked with him it seemed to me a silly thing to be ashamed for as little cause as I bad."

"I remember what you talked of to me that night," said Windsor thoughtfully. "You talked of criminology. You talked of heredity in crime. I thought it odd at the moment that you should be interested in such a subject."

"And I'm still interested."

"I knew," said Windsor, smiling, "that your hero would win you over to his sufferings before long. Have you decided yet to help him to a new start in life?"

She regarded him with a sort of cold, judging disappointment.

"You think he lurked there in wait for me that night?"

"There's hardly a reasonable doubt of that, is there?" he replied good-naturedly.

"Why should I be angry because you don't understand?" she murmured. "It sounds so like a cock-and-bull story that I'm inclined to doubt now and then that it ever really happened. And you may be sure that you are the first and only person who has heard it."

"I take that as a compliment," he said.

"I mean it as a very sincere one," she answered.

"And your nocturnal visitor hasn't yet asked for money?"

"He is really not after money at all."

"Well?"

"He came for me."

Windsor looked at her with starting eyes.

"I admit that it sounds wild," she said with a faint smile. "And that is where he links up with your letter. You see, I wanted to believe your letter. I wanted to believe that men were capable of such fine and impulsive outbreaks. But I simply couldn't. But last night my nameless friend came again."

"Ah?"

"Now you're excited!"

"I've reason to be. He came again?"

"Yes, and he did the thing you think he could not have been bold enough to do."

"He actually," cried Windsor, "he actually had the effrontery to—to make love to you?"

"He did. Not sentimental nonsense, but a wild, strong, free outburst. It swept me off my feet, literally. It dazed me. He seemed to be bringing the stars about my head.

"Then I gathered that he was saying good-by. He wanted to tell me what I meant to him, and then he was leaving me forever. He would accept no help; he would leave no trace. He simply came with a storm of the wildest—the most strange and barbarous-beautiful eloquence—and then he walked away into the night!"

She was afire, in talking. And Windsor, mutely watching her, knew what had awakened her from childhood to womanhood within those few days. It was the man of the night.

She went on: "Then, with his words still going back and forth like fire through me I went up to my room and picked up your letter for the twentieth time. It no longer seemed wild or strained. It seemed the frankest and the most beautiful truth. And I saw at once that it *was* possible for a man to feel suddenly, and deeply, and lastingly. Not like the men I have known all my life—not like such men—pardon me—as you seemed to me before I read this letter—but like something more real, closer to the soil, fuller of native strength.

"Do I make all this very vague and childish in your ears?"

"I see, now," he said. "But where does it lead?"

"I will tell you where I hope it shall lead," she answered. "I hope it will lead to a fine, strong friendship. I'm going to do an unusual and rash thing. I'm going to ask you to come here often."

"Do you call that rashness?"

"You don't understand. I'm asking you to come and try to show me what you really are. You see, I know from your letter and from the words of that man in the night that it is possible for men to be

lighted with fire inside. I want to find the source of that fire. I want to understand your strength. Will you understand when I say that so far you have held up an impenetrable shield before me? It was only in that letter that you lowered the shield."

Perhaps the man for whom Diogenes hunted would have admitted then that he had not written the letter. But all mortals are weak, and Windsor was extremely mortal. He could not confess, not while she sat so close to him, with such a peculiar charm about her. She was like the spring winds, heavy with perfumes. At least, Windsor was man enough to feel a deep pity for the visitor of the night. His thought passed automatically from this stranger to the man who had written the letter—the connection which the two had in the mind of the girl.

Then a strange surmise caught at him.

He said with a sudden new interest: "Will you describe this stranger of yours?"

"I told you I had never seen his face."

"But his voice?"

"Are you interested even in that?"

"I think you said there was something unusual about it."

"You are excited?" she queried.

"Because I think," he answered, "that I know the man to whom you refer. And if I do—if he is the man who has come to you those two times, then he is the most damnable, the most subtle and dangerous devil who ever walked in the form of a man! Tell me about his voice!"

She was startled by his direct command, but she answered mechanically: "A very deep, strong voice."

"Not loud," suggested Windsor, "but with a peculiar soft vibrancy about it—a carrying quality—a voice which makes one think that it has not been used a great deal—the voice of a generally silent man?"

"You have exactly hit upon it!" she cried. "You do know him!"

And her face lighted. That of Windsor darkened correspondingly.

"I think I do—too well. But I'll make sure of him. Tell me: was there anything remarkable about his size?"

"Only his largeness. He was very tall. As tall as you, I think."

"It is he!" muttered Windsor.

He rose.

"Why do you speak like that?" she asked, rising with him, and then, her glance going up to his face: "Mr. Windsor, what is it that you intend to do?"

"Justice," said the big man. "If it's in my power, I'm going to see that justice is done!"

She cried as he turned away: "No, no! You mustn't go like this! For the sakes of both of you—for your sake most of all. Mr. Windsor, I know that man is dangerous if you cross him in a humor like this!"

"If it's the last act of my life," said Windsor, "he shall be crossed to-day!"

And he strode from the room without a farewell.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE HOLE-IN-THE-WALL.

IT was earlier that day, before the message from Elizabeth Dorn reached Windsor, and Martha Perce was walking through a crowded district on the East Side—the lower East Side, where the unwashed children swarm across the streets from gutter to gutter, where the traffic literally ploughs its way through a mass of humanity, where human life seems cheap, where man seems closest to the animal.

Through that swarm Martha Perce picked her way gaily, blithely. She was walking by choice, for she saw the day as the greatest in her life. Her plans with Masters were complete. With this great event finished, with Axson hopelessly in the power of her lover, she and Masters were to leave America and pass abroad for a long, long vacation. They were to spend the summer in the Scottish Highlands, the autumn in Paris, the winter in Sicily.

As a matter of fact, her mind was fuller of the dresses she should buy in Paris and wear through Italy than it was of the unscrubbed boys who brushed against her skirt. And she walked with an indescribable buoyancy; like a leaf carried lightly along by the wind. It was one of those foul and narrow alleys where the shadow in summer seems a black blanket of stifling heat

and in winter a breath of ice. Yet in this place Martha was too much at home to look about her in curiosity. She held straight on until she reached the door of a second-hand clothes shop. It was a basement shop, the entrance being a flight of perilously steep stairs. Its rails were crowded with a host of worn garments, tagged with the prices in gigantic letters.

From the mysterious shadows of this shop, however, rose a shrill jangle of voices, a mighty pleading that would have been worthy of the cause of a falling empire.

"Two thirty-two! Two thirty-two for that rag?"

"Rag? Rag, call you it? *Gott im Himmel! Geliebter Gott!* Dot elegant coat—a rag?"

And a nasal whine replied: "Listen, bo. I know you got a kind heart. I can see it in your map. Two bucks is all I got. Honest to Gawd! Here—you let me take the coat—you take the two bucks—we call it square!"

"Back! *Zurückkomme!* I have a wife, I have two kinder. Do I take the *brot* out of their mouths? Do they go barefoot so that a *schwein* like you shall go in fine clothes? *Vot?*"

And Martha Perce, walking through the shop, saw to the right the proprietor, a German Jew with a forehead and a chin so narrow and retreating, and a nose so gigantic, that his face seemed only one feature. She slipped down a narrow avenue, crowded with ragged clothes, for the pride of his stock was exposed to the public gaze near the pavement. His little, beady eyes, darting through the mazes of his stock, fixed on her. She made a sign with rapid fingers, and he nodded to her. An imperceptible acquiescence which in no wise interrupted the steady storm of his argument. Before she disappeared, however, it was plain that the sight of the two dollars was taking the heart from his eloquence.

She continued straight to the back of the little store, and through a filthy little room which apparently served as the living place of the Jew. A closet filled one corner of the room. She opened the door of this, pressed through a mass of clothes, and fumbled against the boards behind.

At length she reached a button that yielded under her touch—the wall opened—and Martha stepped through, pressing the door to behind her. It was very massively made, that door. Two heavy slabs of solid wood—single sheets—contained a thick padding of sawdust. The door was almost sound-proof.

The passage into which the door opened was hardly larger than the door itself, and led down a steep pitch of steps. It was utterly dark in the passage and the steps were correspondingly invisible, but Martha descended with the confidence of long familiarity. At the foot of the stairs a second wall blocked her progress. She tapped against it, interspersing the raps with little spaces, like a telegrapher. A section of it gave way at once and swung very slowly back, the opening not more than an inch in width. Through this a sharp ray of light darted out like a pointing finger of white against her.

"It's Martha," she said, stepping into the ray of light.

The door instantly stood wide and revealed a man with an unhooded, dark lantern beside it.

"Evening," he said. "How's things outside?"

"All right," she answered, stepping through, "but it's morning, not evening."

He raised the lantern so that the light shone more directly into her face. From the shadow in which this threw him she felt his eyes burn into hers.

"Listen!" he whispered. "You got the dope. I know that. When am I goin' to be clear of all this?"

"Lie low, Jimmy," she answered calmly. "The dicks are still buzzing about. You'll come out when you have a chance to make your getaway. You can trust to that!"

"I been a whole month down here in hell," he returned despondently, closing the ponderous door. "It's about time something turned up. They ain't keepin' me a-purpose because they can't land another for this job?"

"If they didn't trust you, d'you think they'd put you on a door?" she said contemptuously. "Use the old bean once in a while, Jimmy!"

"Lay off on the panning," he growled in answer; "I guess I'm O. K. here, all right."

"You sure are. Where's Clune?"

"On the hop," said the other. "I guess he's hitting the pipe."

"If he is, he'll catch hell. He's supposed to be on the job to-day. Where 'll I find him?"

"Get Lu Chi. He knows about Clune most generally."

So Martha Perce turned and went on down the passage. It was full of windings and branchings here and there. It would have confused any one but him who kept a map of the place in his mind. Once or twice figures passed her in the narrow passage, flattening against the wall and sidling till they were by. And each one kept his face scrupulously toward her. Each one was, catlike, on the alert.

So she reached, at length, a little square room with a roof so low that she could not stand erect. Entering, she stood bowed and looked down into the wrinkled face of a Chinaman who sat cross-legged on a mat at one side of the room. On shelves on the wall beside him were ranged alcohol lamps, pipes, and little tin cans. Before him stood a delicate balance scales. The eye of the girl surveyed the ugly face of the opium-seller with a calm interest.

"How's business, Lu?" she asked.

The round, bald head rolled forward on the thick and scraggy neck.

"Good!" said Lu Chi.

His dim old eyes wandered from her to his assortment of opium utensils on the shelves beside him.

"No," said the girl, shaking her head in disgust. "I'm not on the hop yet, Lu. But where's Clune?"

His vacant eye looked sadly past her. He shook his head.

"You old fool!" said the girl angrily. "I'm not going to take him away from you for good. Besides, it's orders from the big chief—Masters! Where's Clune!"

Lu Chi grinned feebly.

"Catchum pretty quick two door down that way."

She favored him with another lingering glance of contempt, and then made her way in the direction he had indicated.

The air was close and savored of underground uncleanness—a prison odor. But when she opened the appointed door her flesh crawled.

The room was so dimly lighted that at first she made out nothing. Then by degrees her eyes found beneath the flicker of the oil-lamp a three-legged stool with a tattered magazine upon it and rimmed about with the stubs of half-smoked cigarettes. The sleeper, on wakening, merely had to reach out his hand and his smoke was ready prepared. A few garments hung on nails against the wall. The bed itself was a hunk modeled after the fashion of the berth on a ship, and on it lay a confused bundle of rags. Through the fetid atmosphere of the place, and by the ghastly light of that lamp, there was a suggestion of death. It was exaggerated in the prone figure which lay with the stained blanket wrapped around its head. And when Martha Perce reached out her hand she was prepared to feel under the dirty shirt of the man the firm, cold flesh of death.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CLUNE.

THE bony shoulder of the sleeper, however, had hardly felt her touch when he twisted and slipped to his feet, breathing hard, crouched, ready like a hunted rat to dart in any direction of escape. By degrees, however, recognition came into his eyes as he stared at her. Finally he rose almost to an erect position. But his hand crept furtively around his shoulder and rested on the spot where her fingers had touched.

Standing straight, he was very tall, though of a skeleton leanness. One shirt-sleeve was rolled up to the elbow and the wrist was larger than any other exposed part of the arm. He seemed literally a skeleton bound together with sinews and no muscle. That angular frame was shaken with a perpetual tremor. All that remained of what must once have been a mighty physical power was a fitful, nervous energy. The very light of his eyes went in and out continually, waxing to ominous brightness

and dying out to a soft glimmer. Buried eyes, with heavy lids, pendulous, red, and swollen—so large that they forever threatened to drop and veil his sight. His nose was thin and high—hawklike, but the mouth beneath it was clothed and obscured in an irregular mass of beard. Not the beard that grows from intention, but that which springs from neglect. Unless it were, perhaps, that this man wished to mask the supernatural ugliness of his face. If so, he failed of his purpose, for the brush of hair served to suggest in the extreme, the misshapen features beneath. He seemed to Martha Perce the ugliest man she had ever seen—the ugliest human being. Yet he reminded her of some one—whom she could not think.

It was not only the misshapen face, but there was a suggestion about it of mingled cringing and tyranny, of mixed cruelty and cowardice. It was as if a fire of malice directed at the whole world had burned away the flesh of the hideous death's-head and made him ready for the grave before his time. His age, however, was indefinite. He might have been fifty. He might have been ninety.

Resolution returned gradually to this shivering giant as he stood before the girl clutching suspiciously at his shoulder.

"Who tipped you off?" he said venomously. "Who gives you the high-sign to touch on *that* shoulder? Eh?"

"And why not that shoulder?"

"Why? Because Red Bender knifed me there. But what d'you want? Spit it out!"

"I'm Martha Perce. Masters has already told you about me."

For an instant the eyes of the skeleton were vague and troubled. Then they flamed at once with evil joy.

"Ah!" drawled Clune. "You're the lass that worked the plant? Oh, I've heard of you. But they needed Billy Clune to put on the fancy touches at the end, eh?"

He rubbed his fleshless hands together; they turned purple under the pressure—rude splotches. Then he laughed. It was rather a convulsion, shaking him from head to foot and ending in a hard cough.

"You nab him," he continued, "and I put him in safe-keeping. Oh, I'll keep him

safe, well enough! Come, and I'll show you where I'll put him."

"It's well enough to talk of putting him," said the girl, "but that's because you haven't seen him. I tell you, we may lead him somewhere, but we'll never *put* him any place. There's no doubt of that. Why, old Skin-and-Bones, he'd break you in two with a look!"

"Would he?" exclaimed the death's-head, and he started back.

But instantly his calm returned, though as he spoke an ague fit shook his limbs.

"He'll never see me. No, not till he's safe and sound down below. Come on, lass, and I'll show you his cage!"

"But will it be ready for him to-night?"

"It's ready now. Come along!"

He led her down a passage, through a door, and down a long flight of steps. This in turn opened on a concrete passageway that ended on a stout door. This he opened, pressed a button, and a small electric globe glowed in the top of the chamber.

"Look!" said he.

"A pretty place," murmured Martha Perce. "But are the walls strong?"

"Concrete."

"And the door?"

"Look at it!"

It was a full three inches thick.

"Let him be Hercules," grinned Billy Clune, "it 'll do him no good. Let him bellow. Not a soul can hear him. Oh, it 'll be a game for poor old Billy Clune!"

"A game?"

"Look here!"

He pointed to a massive iron shutter not more than four inches square and opening from the inside.

"Billy Clune 'll stand here, and when he begs to get out—"

"He'll never beg in a thousand years," said the girl.

"Oh, maybe he's brave, but wait till the darkness begins to eat in on him—like acid. I tell you, I *know*! You begin to think of the fine yellow sunlight. You begin to be sickest of all for the sound of a man's voice. The damned darkness turns a minute into a year. I've seen 'em come out of that bole with white hair that was black when they went in. All that in a night.

"Aye, he'll holler for company, right enough. And Billy Clune will be standin' bere listening. Maybe he'll open the shutter, and then he'll see Billy Clune's face close to his. Eh?"

Martha Perce shuddered.

"Ay, none of 'em like to look at me. No, I ain't pretty. But he'll look out and see me, and I'll tell him how close he is to hell."

"What a devil you are!" murmured the girl.

"Am I?" sneered Billy Clune. "And what are you, my fine beauty? What are you?"

He led the way back and up the stairs to the main floor of the underground tunnels.

"But maybe I can talk to him. Maybe I can soothe him a bit if I knew more about this cull. Gimme the dope on him, lass."

"You know enough," she said. "And you've told me enough. Your part of the work is planned. I'll do mine. There's no need for us to talk. Good-by."

He blocked her way.

"But how can I talk polite to this bird if I don't even know his name? Gimme his name, lass!"

She answered rather to get the creature out of her way than because she wished him to know: "Axson. Now stand away from me!"

The first word she spoke, indeed, effectually removed him from her path. As if he had been struck violently in the face, he sagged back against the wall, his bony arms outspread in all their length, his spider-hands gripping at the boards.

His strength came back with a surge just as she stepped past him. He clutched her arm with such sudden and terrible strength that the skinny fingers seemed about to force their way through the flesh.

"Get your dirty hands away from me!" said the girl sharply. "I'll have you milled for this!"

"The name! The name!" repeated the monster.

"I've told you once. What does it mean to you? Get back or I'll have you hided!"

The grotesque pushed his face close to hers.

"Tell me, my dear, my beauty," he said, and his upper lip, lifting in the snarl, displayed a row of yellow wolf-fangs. "Tell me, or I'll wring that soft little neck for you. D'ye hear?"

She shrank back from this monstrous demoniac in real alarm. She could bring a dozen men to her aid with a single shout, perhaps, but in that instant Billy Clune might have fastened his grip in the hollow of her throat. She felt the strength of a madman in the fingers that held her shoulder.

"Axson," she said again.

As if she had touched him with fire, a scream came from the twisting lips of the giant.

"Axson?" he repeated. "No, no, no!"

And he shook her until her teeth rattled in her head like castanets.

"Help!" screamed Martha Perce.

Dull shouts rose instantly in answer.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DOPE.

"DON'T call! Don't scream!" muttered Billy Clune, and he flashed a hunted glance up and down the passage. "I tell you, it mustn't be Axson! Not young Axson? Young Johu Axson?"

"It isn't! It isn't!" she assented, terrified by those wild and wandering eyes. "I was only joking with you, Billy. Let me go!"

"Joking were you, you she-devil? No, you're telling me the straight! But, no, it can't be John Axson. What's he look like?"

"A little man, blue eyes, blond hair."

His fingers relaxed with a sigh. But before she could slip away, he seized her again.

"Tell me what he's like!" he shrieked. "And if you lie again I'll—throttle you!"

"He's a big man," stammered the girl. "As tall as you! Let me go, Billy!"

"As tall as me?" groaned the death's-head. "God!"

The rescuers were already racing down the tunnel close to them. But before they arrived a child could have handled Billy Clune. The moment of mad strength had

left him. He sagged back, drooping against the wall.

"What's up?" asked the man in the lead, as he halted, panting. "What's wrong down here? Somebody holler?"

"Only old Billy Clune, Mac," said the girl. "There's something wrong with him. He's off his nut. Thought he was going to choke me a minute back!"

"The old fool!" answered the man addressed as Mac. "He is off his nut. Been off for a year with the hop."

"Look at that!" murmured Martha.

Billy Clune straightened again and stretched out his clawlike hands toward the girl. He seemed to be feeling his way to her.

"There's been a mistake, Martha Perce," he said. "I tell you, there's been a mistake! Send off these fellers. Lemme talk to you alone!"

"Keep him away, Mac," implored the girl. "If he touches me again I'll—I'll knife him!"

"Keep back from her!" snarled Mac.

So saying, he smote the tall man on the chest with the flat of his hand. The force of the blow sent him staggering back, coughing.

"Martha Perce!" he screamed, in a paroxysm of eagerness and the harsh coughing.

"Will you listen to him?" asked Mac. "The poor devil seems nutty about something!"

"All right," she said, controlling herself strongly. "What is it?"

"Go back to Masters," replied the death's-head, "and tell him that he's got to call off his bloodhounds!"

"If you're crazy enough to think he'll do that," said the girl, "go tell him yourself."

"Go tell him!" shrieked Billy Clune, "that the man he wants is *my son!*"

"Dear God!" whispered Martha Perce. "Your son?"

"Mine, mine, mine!" screamed Billy Clune, beating his bony breast at every word. "If Johnny done wrong it's because he was raised wrong. That devil Windsor—foxy Windsor—smooth Windsor—he done it—he *made* him crooked. Bring Windsor here. Let Johnny go clear!"

"What's all this bunk?" asked Mac, scowling.

"The poor devil!" murmured the girl, white with pity and horror. "Masters is out to get a bird that Clune claims for his son. He's ugly enough to be Clune's boy. Mac, you'll have to lock up Billy. The chief will break everybody if this stunt with Axson goes wrong!"

"Listen to me!" shrieked Clune, and he clawed his way among the men toward her. "Masters can have me; he can have my body and my blood. Go tell him that. If he lays a hand on Johnny I'll—"

"Shut up!" roared Mac, and he clapped his band with stunning force across the jabbering mouth of the old man. "Shut up. Your blood? How much blood is there in your old snake's body?"

"Easy, Mac, easy!" cautioned the girl. "Don't bust him in two. Maybe he's right."

"Aw, it's a pipe-dream," said Mac scornfully. "Here, hoys, pick up the old fool and take him along."

He fell back beside Martha while his attendants lifted the gaunt form of Billy Clune and bore him on ahead, screaming and pleading every foot of the way.

"What 'll you do with him, Mac?" she asked. "Don't go too hard on him, Masters thinks he's pretty valuable, you know."

"I know," nodded Mac. "I'm not going to use him bad. But I'm going to put him to sleep."

"The dope?"

"Yep."

"Maybe he won't take it."

"Him? Not take it?"

Mac laughed with the scorn of superior knowledge.

"He's been off the hop for two days, nearly, getting ready for this job of Masters's, I guess. Why, when he sees the stuff he'll be like a hungry man smellin' bacon. I know him!"

"See you keep him safe," warned the girl. "He knows Axson is with Windsor, and if he knows that he knows where to reach him. And if he gives him warning, I tell you Masters will be down on us all like a demon, and you know what he is when he starts wrong!"

"Don't I!" said Mac, shrugging his shoulders. "Aw, I'll keep this old wreck still! Shoot him in through that door to the left, boys. Here, one of you. Go tell Lu Chi to bring some stuff. On the run!"

It was a vacant room, much like the one in which she had first seen Clune—a wretched place. The only air was that which came through a small grating high up on the wall.

"This place isn't fit for a dog!" she said. "Are you going to leave him here?"

"In ten minutes," said Mac coldly, "he'll think that he's in heaven."

"But is it safe? Doesn't that grating open on a way to the street?"

"It does."

He tried the bars of the grating.

"But old Billy couldn't budge 'em. He hasn't the strength of a girl except when he's batty with the dope, or something like that."

His messenger returned with alcohol-lamp already lighted, the telltale pipe, and a little can, together with a long needle. All this time Billy Clune had kept up a shrill, hysterical pleading. When he saw the opium outfit he began to curse horribly.

"I'll see you in hell before I touch the stuff!" he shouted. "Martha, gimme one chance. Lemme say one word to you!"

"Pat," said Mac. "Start cooking him a pill, will you?"

Accordingly, the man who had brought the outfit kneeled beside the alcohol-lamp, inserted the long needle in the little can, gathered a globule of the black contents on the end, and began to turn this slowly over the flame.

"Now watch!" said Mac, and turned with chuckle to the girl.

Two men had been using their utmost efforts to keep Billy Clune motionless on the edge of the bunk. Now his struggles gradually relaxed.

Under their bald, vulture eyelids, his eyes fixed upon the flame of the alcohol-lamp. He raised a faltering, bony hand, and brushed away the whiskers from before his mouth. Then he began to curse softly, steadily, but all the while his glance kept steadily on the cooking of the "pill."

"He'll never smoke it," said the girl.

"Never! He's got the life of his son to think of, Mac. Do you think he'd take the dope in preference to that?"

"In preference to a million dollars and his son together!" sneered Mac.

"Can you trust the work of the dope?"

"Trust it? I'll leave him here with this can of stuff and he'll never come out until it's gone or he's smoked himself dead. Trust the dope? I tell you, Martha, it's stronger than irons and chains for some of 'em! Ah! Watch, now!"

The skeleton hand of Billy Clune was slowly reaching out to Pat.

"Gimme!" he said.

Without a word Pat surrendered the needle and Clune began to breathe with a rattle of horrible eagerness through parted lips.

"Come out!" said Mac, and beckoned to them all. "We ain't needed any more."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BLOW.

WHEN Windsor returned from the house of Dorn he found that Axson was out. All afternoon he waited for the grim-faced giant to return. He paced the rooms with the eagerness of a starved wolf and watched the sunlight strike through the window at a greater and greater slant. Finally it assumed tints of rose and gold, and the sudden twilight set in—the twilight of the city, with the shadow falling from vast skyscrapers many a minute before the upper sky is dimmed.

Then, in the half-light, the outer door of the apartment opened at length and the familiar heavy-light footstep went down the hall—weight and softness uncannily combined. In the living-room Windsor intercepted his man. He said nothing. He merely stood straight with his arms at his sides, waiting; but Axson, after a quick glance at his host, halted.

"Well?" he asked sharply, after a moment of silence.

"I've seen her," said Windsor in a sepulchral voice.

And his eye measured the colossus from head to foot. He had never seemed so

large as in this moment. Yet there was fighting blood in Windsor. It ran back for many a generation, and he was determined.

"If you've had bad luck with her," said Axson dryly, "I'm sorry. I've done what I could. But I'll have to hear the story some other time."

"There is no time like the present," answered Windsor, retaining his calm with a great effort.

"Very well," said Axson.

"Sit down."

But the colossus leaned one great hand on the back of a chair and waited silently.

Windsor in turn locked each of the doors. Then he came back and faced his guest.

"I have seen her," he repeated, "and she has told me everything."

"Within two hours," said Axson. "I have an important engagement. I'm afraid I can't wait to hear it all."

"You're very mistaken," answered Windsor. "You will wait until I'm completely through. Besides, what I have to say will not take long."

"Good," said Axson. "But stand back a little from me. You're excited, and being so near may prompt you to do some rash thing."

"Impossible," said Windsor. "I am the soul of patience. In fact, I dare not let myself think of all that is on my mind. Axson, I'm going to tell you a story."

Not a flash of apprehension lightened the eyes of Axson. He seemed to be studying his host impersonally, as one might study a masterpiece in oil painting, something which reveals itself more every instant.

"On second thought," went on Windsor, growing white and stiff about the lips, "I'm going to tell you only the summary of a story. My nerves won't stand the whole thing. Axson, what would you think of a fellow who buys his way into the confidence of another man, worms himself into another man's heart under pretense of friendship, and then knifes him in the back?"

"I am not in the habit of making comments," said Axson.

"But even you will have to make some remark on this. Consider a man who is so close to another that he can even advise

him in his affairs of the heart, and then uses his intimate knowledge to undo his friend. Isn't that act like one who puts before a hungry man food with poison in it? Answer me!"

But Axson said not a word.

"Listen!" said Windsor, quivering in every muscle of his big body. "I tell you, I have talked with her and she has told me everything. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Nothing!"

"Nothing! Nothing that you have met her in the night, made love to her, tangled her into a cunning web of romance? Nothing that you so worded the letter you wrote for me that you won her for yourself under pretense of winning her for me? Is all that nothing?"

"Won her?" said Axson, and his face contorted with a terrible swift pain. "Did you say: won her, Windsor?"

His voice was not much louder than a whisper, but the hollow murmur of it filled the room from wall to wall, and in the little bitter silence which followed a faint echo seemed to repeat the question.

"I said it. You've won her, damn you! No, she may not fully understand as yet just how much she's won, but she is wakened, roused, on fire. She's trembling to the fall. She's in love!"

"In love with a voice in the night?" queried Axson.

There was something so bitter and so eager at once in his manner that Windsor drew back and regarded his companion with a mixture of wonder and hatred.

"Is it possible," he murmured, "that you did not know what you were doing all this time? No, it is not possible!"

"Windsor," said the giant, "she does not know my name!"

"What is a name?"

"Is it so little as that?" cried Axson, and a flush swept up his face.

It died out at once and left him gray, leaden.

He added in a choked murmur: "She has never seen my face!"

"Do you dare to deny," cried Windsor, "that you have been playing a cold-hearted game with her?"

"Game?" repeated Axson vaguely.

"What! Axson, in the name of Heaven, do you love this pure, beautiful girl?"

And the giant answered with uplifted face, quietly: "With all my heart!"

After a time Windsor said softly: "Then you are an unspeakable cur!"

The colossus did not move.

"Do you hear?"

And in a rising voice: "An unspeakable cur!"

And yet Axson still betrayed no sign of hearing.

"Then," said Windsor, "I'll do the last thing."

And stepping a long pace closer he drew back his arm and smote his open palm, with all his strength, upon the mouth of Axson.

Instantly, thereafter, like a man who has dropped a high-power explosive, he leaped back to the further side of the room, crouching, ready to fight for his life in a desperate, hopeless battle.

But by the dim twilight he saw Axson still unmoved, his hand still resting on the back of the chair. The imprint of white fingers was across his mouth. A drop of blood gathered slowly and then trickled down the chin of the giant, leaving a little trace of red.

Yet that silence, that movelessness, meant more to Windsor than the bellowing of cannon. The two dark eyes fixed upon him were like the round, black muzzles of two rifles, pointing a message toward his heart. The sweat of nameless terror glistened on the forehead of Windsor. He began to wonder why that large head did not rise and wipe away the trace of blood. Then he felt that the first movement of the giant would be to spring at him, a catapulting mass of bone and muscle, Herculean in strength, catlike in activity.

He had thought it all out coolly before. He had one chance in ten to beat down the monster whose strength he had felt those days before in a single blow. He was willing to take that one chance. But now that he faced the impending danger he knew that he had been a fool. There was not one chance in ten. There was not a chance in a million. It was death that

looked out at him from those two inhumanly steady eyes. He had as much chance as an unarmed man pitted against the might of a tiger and the cunning of a human brain.

In fancy he felt the grip of that large band on his throat, tightening slowly with the power of hot steel shrinking into place. He felt the finger tips crunch through his muscle; he felt them close against the bone.

The lower jaw of Windsor sagged. He began panting, heavily, with a harsh rattle distinctly audible throughout the room. He could no longer look the monster in the face, but his eyes wandered swiftly from door to door. Was there a ghost of a chance that he might leap to one of those doors, turn the key, and escape? No, he could hear in fancy the mocking laugh of the giant as he dragged back his prey into the room.

Too late to think now. The giant moved. He drew forth a handkerchief, brushed the stain from his mouth, turned slowly, and with unhurried step walked from the room. Windsor saw, but did not comprehend. Blackness and flashes of fire darted across his eyes as he watched the door close. And then he knew that he was saved. Strength went from him. He slipped down into a senseless heap against the wall.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE WAITING.

WHEN he recovered from that nervous collapse physically, his mind was still a dazed blank. There hung over him a sense like the impending danger of the nightmare—the pursuer about to reach him, the stifling weight about to fall. And the sphinx-face of Axson, unsmiling, yet smiling always—incredibly ugly, incredibly terrible.

He felt certain that he had escaped for the moment merely because a sudden death would not suit Axson. Even now, perhaps, he was devising some horrible plan of revenge. He knew perfectly that to this man death was an accident, a trifling, everyday matter.

So he sat with his head in his hands, imagining horrors for the future. Moments fled. It was pitch dark. Bacon came, at length, with word that dinner was waiting to be served.

He called for coffee and brandy.

And he had it served to him in the black room, and sipping cup after cup and pony after pony. The one burned his throat, the other electrified his mind.

Finally, to escape from the terrific darkness, he switched on the lights. But suddenly he remembered that lights within would only serve as eyes to one watching from without. Perhaps even at that instant the swarthy giant crouched catlike at the window, peering in, devising schemes of ruin.

Windsor, nearly fainting, switched off the light again and staggered to his chair. Finally the full knowledge reached him that Axson would return to him this night. First there was an impulse to lock the doors, to call in friends, to start a wild revel. But he dismissed this thought at once. What were locks to Axson? What were numbers? And how terrible to fall in the midst of happiness, with laughing friends about him, wine bright in the light, and then the sudden blow, oblivion for him.

At least he would be prepared to make a last stand. He started to leave the room, but sat down again almost at once. Doors were things of terror; what might they not open upon? He pressed a button beneath the table on which he leaned. The door opened—a mere black place on the black wall. He heard the voice of Bacon speaking through the night.

“Go to my room,” said Windsor in a dull, mechanical voice. “Open the steamer trunk in the large closet. Take the automatic from the upper tray. Make sure that it is loaded, and bring it to me.”

In due time the door opened again; the heavy butt of the gun snuggled against his palm.

It brought an instant thrill of courage—almost happiness. But only an instant. He began to see more clearly that Axson would never walk back calmly before him and face an automatic with its seven

winged messengers of death. No, he would kill from behind, suddenly, safely.

Or what if he did stride suddenly into the room? Could Windsor hit a mark with even an automatic and its seven following shots?

He raised his hand with the gun in it.

It wobbled crazily from side to side.

And Windsor dropped his head upon his hands and sobbed, harshly, hysterically.

Now hot shame swept over him, when he heard his own sobs. He straightened in his chair with a jerk. He remembered scenes in college. He remembered how he had crashed through the line on the football field. A plunging fullback; they had called him "Terrible" Jimmy Windsor in those days. Many an old press-clipping flashed back before his eyes. Crises in games—a few yards to the goal—and then Terrible Jimmy Windsor had crashed like a cannon-ball through the line. He remembered days of exaltation. One night before an important game half the youths of the college had gathered beneath his window. He heard the roar of hundreds of voices: "Here's to Jimmy Windsor, drink her down, drink her down!"

Other scenes. The polo field. The flare of color from the stands. Faces of women and excited men. The thunder of hoofs. The whizz and cracks of the hammers. The darting of the ball. The catapulting down the field into seemingly inextricable masses of horse-flesh. And always his name living in the air from the spectators.

Other scenes. Hunting. Once more he was in the African jungle. Once more the tall grass parted silently before him as if a hand were brushing it aside. Once more a tawny head thrust through the opening. Lightnings came in the vast yellow eyes. The jaws snarled open. The head lowered; a yellow body flashed through the air; his heavy gun roared. And the lion lay kicking at his feet.

In all those places Jimmy Windsor had never been afraid. But was he not a cringing coward now? It was different. Even the lion was a creature of flesh and blood. He had the feeling that the body of Axson was as immortal as the granite of the sphinx which his hideous face suggested.

Then he thought of approaching Axson gently, with flattering words. Nonsense! He might as well speak to a stone image. Had he not drawn the blood of the man? His fingers still, in fancy, tingled with that stroke. He saw again the little drop of blood form on those whitened lips and steal downward. He could have spent half the blood in his whole body to recall that single drop.

But what was this? The outer door was opening. A stride was coming down the hall, heavy and yet soft—an uncanny lightness.

All the blood rushed from the heart of Windsor to his brain and back again. He pushed back his chair and dropped to his knees behind the table. Then, recognizing the uselessness of that childish deceit, he resumed his place at the table. He swept a book before him. It was thick. He could rest the barrel of the gun upon that to steady his shot.

Now there was the click of the turning door-knob and Windsor curled his forefinger around the trigger. The door swung slowly wide, and then Windsor knew that he had not the strength to fire the shot!

At the door stood Axson, his hand still upon the knob. He stood erect, his head far back, with a sort of Roman sternness in his whole attitude.

He said: "I have seen the girl again."

Why did he not start and shrink back when he saw the gun? Perhaps it was because he could not make it out in the darkness. And yet Windsor felt with a sudden horror that the big man in the door was inviting the shot. Axson himself was white-ly illumined by the shaft of light down the hall.

"I have seen the girl again," he repeated. "But I did not speak to her."

He paused. Something that might have been a smile twisted his lips.

"It was not necessary to speak. I stood with my hat off where she could see my face. Do you understand, Windsor? When she saw my face she cried out and turned away. Now I suppose she is waiting for you to come to her."

Life, warmth, flooded the brain of Windsor. He sprang to his feet.

"Axson," he cried.

"Well?"

"In the name of God, have you really done this?"

"I have an important engagement," said Axson. "I am already overdue for it. Good night!"

"No, no!" shouted Windsor, and rushing around the table he ran at the giant.

Yet before he reached that goal something stopped him short. It was the tingling of the fingers of his right hand.

"You've got to stay a moment," he stammered.

"Why?"

"You've got to explain—"

"I explain nothing more."

"Then you've got to hear me tell you why—how—I thought—"

"But you have changed your mind."

"Axson, you bear me no ill-will?"

"None."

"There's no grudge between us?"

"Nothing. It was fate!"

"Then you'll come back to-morrow and—"

"I think not."

"What do you mean?"

"I think I shall not come back from this appointment."

"In the name of God, Axson, what are you going to do?"

"Nothing; everything. It is only a premonition. Good night."

He closed the door.

Windsor snatched it open, but looking down the hall, he saw the resolute, broad back and shoulders of Axson and knew the man could never be called back.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SHUTTING OF THE DOOR.

AT the appointed corner Axson met Martha Perce. She made a picture even more dejected than the one he had seen in his room on that memorable night. She wore a shapeless gray overcoat with a narrow collar—a round-topped straw hat—wisps of hair straggled down from beneath the brim of the hat. Her face was colorless; the shadows were

doubly deep around her eyes; the eyes themselves blazed with a restless light that flickered dim and bright when she saw the bulky form of Axson.

"I'm three minutes late," said Axson. "Sorry. I could not come sooner."

"Three minutes? Three years!" she snarled, and then clung to his arm as if she feared to have offended him.

"You ain't mad at me?"

He brushed her off.

"Take me to the place," he said.

"This way—straight ahead. Mr. Axson, no matter what comes of this I want you to know—"

"Be silent," he ordered curtly. "Say nothing except what is absolutely necessary. We'll make better progress that way."

She flashed a glance up at him from beneath the brim of her hat and then they went on without another word.

It was a far different street from the one she had walked down that morning. Then the children had made two-thirds of the crowd. Now, since the night was not warm enough to drive the youngsters out, the street was thronged with grown people alone. The noise was not so loud. It was rather a steady undertone with a touch of the ominous about it. Now and then the laughter of some woman cut through that steady hum of voices; otherwise the sound flowed on like a river. It had a hypnotizing effect.

They approached the alley in which the shop of the second-hand clothes dealer stood.

"Listen!" said the girl. "This is important. We're going into the Hole-in-the-Wall through that shop straight ahead—the one with the old Jew standing out in front. He's in on the game with the Triple X. Yep, he's a wise old bird, and he gets a fat rake-down. He's rich from it, and the second-hand clothes game is only a fence for him. He doesn't know you, and he may get leery. But I'll tip him off that you're a friend of mine and I think we'll get by him O. K. Understand? But if anything goes wrong, we won't take the chance. Get me? I figure the way to get by the entrance is plain bluff. What?"

"I'll follow you," said Axson. "But how can you get by the guards with a stranger?"

"Sure, I thought of that right off the bat. I think it'll be a cinch. They know I want to get my pal out, but they'll never figure I got the crust to try a plant like this. They'll figure I'm simply leading in a new guy. That's O. K. They know me; I'll tip 'em off that you're O. K., and it'll work fine. You wait and see!"

He shrugged his shoulders, and followed the girl as she turned in at the door of the Jew's shop. He flashed a glance at them.

"A new pal of mine," whispered the girl in a voice just loud enough to reach to Axson.

"Lose vun; win vun!" grinned the Jew.

"T' hell with you and your hum jokes!" snarled the girl with well-assumed anger. "G'wan, bo!"

This to Axson, who started on down the narrow stairs.

Inside she clutched his arm again and chuckled gleefully.

"Y' see how it works? Ain't I a slippery one? Oh, boy!"

She led the way straight on past the rear of the shop, through the Jew's room, through the closet, and then through the secret panel. Down the steps in the utter darkness they passed. She tapped on the wall at the end of the passage.

As in the morning, so now the door opened again the least fraction of an inch, and into the ray of light which issued from it the girl stepped and tilted back her head so that the watcher within could see her face. Instantly the door opened half-way.

"And here's a new pal of mine. He's O. K.," said the girl.

"What's he got to let him through?" growled the guard.

"Me!" she answered with angry emphasis. "Don't raise no fuss, ho! You know me!"

"I'll take a chance, I guess," said the crook. "C'me in, pal."

Axson stepped through, and the door instantly closed behind him. He could tell by the sound of the click that it was of the most massive material. For good or ill he was now fully in the Hole-in-the-Wall.

The girl was leading straight on down the passage. When they had turned the first dimly lighted corner he laid a hand on her shoulder. As she turned he caught her by the throat with both hands—not a hard grip, or else she should never have spoken again; but sufficiently close for him to stop her voice if he wished. He dragged her close and tilted up her face. It was white as death, and her eyes were supernaturally wide.

"You little cheat!" he whispered savagely. "Don't you know I've used you only as a tool? If you've got prayers to say, make them quick. This is your last minute!"

For an instant, with set teeth, she glared up at him, and her mind was working with the speed of a racing machine. Then she made her determination. After all, it was the only chance which remained to her.

"Damn you!" she sobbed softly. "Finish me, then. If Larry's got no chance, I don't want to live!"

He released her instantly.

"I thought I saw you exchange a glance with the second guard," he said calmly, "and I wanted to make sure. But if there's really a Larry I'll make my try to get him away. Lead on!"

She hesitated just the fraction of an instant. Then a perverse desire to question him was too much for her.

"Have you come all this way without knowing for yourself whether or not there was a Larry? Tell me that, bo!"

"I've never believed you," he answered calmly. "I've never believed all that you told me, but I'm acting on the chance that any of it may be right. Go on. We're wasting time!"

For another instant she remained staring at him. He could guess that something of importance was passing through her mind. He could not know that at the last minute she was shrinking from her part. If he had smiled at her; if he had said a friendly word during that interval he would have been saved. But his grim eyes held steadily into the distance. He looked more like a sphinx than a human being. And in sharp contrast the girl saw the face of Louis Masters, the handsome

features, the large, brown eyes. She turned on her heel.

"Make it snappy, then. We're on our way!"

They did not speak again all the time they were winding through the passages and down the last flight of steps into the concrete hall.

Here she halted again and pressed back against him.

"We're almost there!" she whispered. "Are you still game, bo?"

"Start on," he muttered sternly.

"Not so loud!" she cautioned. "God knows how many birds is around here! I ain't trusted, Axson!"

"Why do you stop here?"

"It's a crazy stunt! Axson, let's go back before it's too late. If we go back now we can get clear without half trying!"

She had gaged him rightly. He sneered openly into her face.

"I've come too far to turn back," he said.

And she muttered to herself: "Right you are! Poor devil!"

She went on down the passage and they stopped before the ponderous door.

"This!" she said.

"How do you get through it?"

"I got the key in wax," she said, chuckling in her triumph, "and I filed out the copy myself. Pretty bad, eh? Look!"

She placed a shining key in the lock. He snatched it out and examined the smooth surface.

"You say that *you* filed out this key?"

She could not meet the grim question of that glance, but with wavering eyes she lied with precision and rapidity.

"That key? Hell, *no*! I palmed off my copy on the guard. He's got it now. I wasn't sure it would work and I didn't have a chance to try it out. But I traded him my key for his while he was drunk this morning. I hope to Gawd he don't get wise before to-morrow."

For an instant longer he maintained his rigid scrutiny. Then he handed back the key.

"Very well," he said, "open the door."

The lock turned noiselessly; the door swung open; a breath of prison damp

swept out to them. From the hall a faint light penetrated to the cell. Axson peered inside.

"My Gawd!" groaned the girl, "they've moved him!"

"No," answered Axson. "What's that over there in the corner—lying on the ground?"

"Where? I see it! Larry!"

The huddled object did not move.

"They got him doped!" moaned the girl, wringing her hands. "They always keep him doped! Wait here; keep an eye peeled. I'll go in and drag him out!"

Once more she gaged his psychology correctly. As she started he caught her shoulder and held her back.

"You could not handle his weight," said Axson. "Let me go."

And he stepped forward into the cell. Even then she did not move. She knew that a wrong step an instant too soon would undo her. Not till he had completely crossed the floor of the cell did she act. Then she seized the edge of the heavy door at the same instant that he leaned above the huddled figure.

The sheer weight of the door was against her. It hung back; it dragged at her shoulders; it seemed to hang motionless for a full second under her full effort before it began to stir.

And even as it started Axson straightened with a snarl like a baffled beast of prey. He straightened and whirled catlike toward the girl. Her whole weight was on the ponderous door now. She was leaning against it. She sobbed with desperate effort.

And now she saw his bulk leap into the air with outstretched arms, like a pouncing panther. Right in his face the door shut—clicked—and at the same instant the shock of a terrific weight smashed against it from within. That blow made the door shiver to the top.

She sprang back, half triumphant, half terrified. Once more the weight smashed against the door, shaking it terribly. But it held. The wood was massive. The frame would have withstood the hattering of a catapult.

Only when she saw this did Martha

Perce straighten, and sigh with relief. She turned to go, then hesitated, and at last turned back and stood with her mouth close to the little iron shutter in the center of the door.

"Axson!" she called.

"I hear you," he answered.

His voice was perfectly calm.

"I'm going to try to get them to deal easily with you," she said.

Something like soft laughter answered her.

"I mean it, so help me God! Axson, will you try to forgive me?"

Again there was the faintest chuckle. A chill ran through her heart.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.



HOW insufferably hot! Minnie, come and open the window at once. The heat in this place is enough to bake me alive. *Minnie!*"

There was no reply to her call, and Natalie Grandon frowned with irritation as she hurried across her dressing-room and opened the top and lower sashes of the window. When she turned and dropped her opera cloak across the back of a chair, her maid appeared in the doorway that communicated with Natalie's room.

"I'm sorry, miss," murmured the maid, blinking. "I just went off—"

"Never mind about making excuses," interrupted her mistress. "I've opened the window myself, but another time please remember that I am not an orchard or a native of the tropics."

"Yes, miss," returned Minnie obediently, and stifling a yawn, placed a chair in front of the dressing-table. Natalie seated herself, and the maid knelt to exchange Miss Grandon's satin shoes for slippers.

This duty performed, Natalie removed the numerous rings and bracelets that adorned her fingers and arms. "Now my collar," she ordered, and Minnie's deft fingers pressed the clasp that secured Miss Grandon's chief article of jewelry.

This *chef-d'œuvre* of the jeweler's art justly deserves a word to itself, for not only was it extremely valuable, but it was extraordinarily beautiful and of uncommon design. Composed of diamonds, rubies and pearls, it was an object of envy among Natalie's circle of friends and a desirable piece of loot for any crook clever enough to lay hands on it and—get away with it.

"It always makes me nervous," murmured the maid as she laid the collar on the dressing table.

"Nervous! Why?"

"Because somebody might steal it. I shall be glad when you send it back to the safe deposit, miss."

"Don't be absurd, Minnie. What good would it be to me if I kept it locked up

all the time? Come, let down my hair and then get me my dressing-gown. I think I'll read a little before I go to bed. What time is it? One o'clock. Well, never mind, you need not call me until ten, so that will give you a good rest."

"Yes, miss," agreed the maid with the readiness expected of a well-paid and trained automaton.

While her hair was being released, Natalie sat back at her ease and contemplated two very satisfying objects. One was her own reflection in the mirror. The other was her collar, but exquisite as was this last, it should be admitted that Natalie Grandon gave the palm to her own fair features.

"Now get my gown," she ordered as her hair fell in a cloudy mass about her shoulders and idly watched in the mirror as her maid turned and walked toward the wardrobe.

For the space of three seconds, the room was as silent as any young society lady's should be. Three soft, noiseless steps did Minnie make, then came a crash, a shrill scream, and the maid fell headlong.

Startled out of her reverie, Natalie whirled round. She stared in amazement at the havoc that had been wrought. Minnie, the demure and trim, lay sprawling on the floor. A small table was overturned and scattered around was a miscellaneous assortment of articles and the broken pieces of a flower vase.

Miss Grandon made a gesture of impatient annoyance.

"How could you be so careless?" she commenced crossly, then as Minnie struggled groaning to a sitting posture, Natalie sprang from her chair. "Are you hurt?" she cried in alarm.

"Not much. I think I've—oh! I've cut my hand. I tripped. I couldn't help falling. I—"

The maid broke off sobbing and Natalie helped her to her feet.

"Do stop," she urged as she examined the cut on Minnie's hand. "It's not very bad. Here, let me tie it up in this towel."

Minnie wiped her eyes and stood quietly while her mistress rendered first aid. During the moment that Natalie bent over the temporary handage, Minnie's eyes strayed

toward the dressing table. She wrenched her hand away suddenly.

"Did you move your collar?" she cried.

"My collar? No. What is the matter with you? I haven't touched it. It's gone."

Side by side, mistress and maid stared at the dressing-table. Together they rushed to see if the precious band of jewels had fallen to the floor and frantically they sought and found—nothing. No hint of how or where it had gone.

"This is incomprehensible—bewildering," gasped Natalie. "It was there and now—"

"The window!" exclaimed the maid.

"Nonsense. It is only open a few inches. Besides, no one could climb up and reach it. The idea is absurd. Yet—"

"It's gone," whispered Minnie.

"And some one must have taken it, so it is useless standing here doing nothing," cried Natalie. "I'm going to call up the police and tell them to send a detective at once. No, don't leave the room, Minnie. There's no purpose to be served by alarming the whole household. For Heaven's sake be quiet."

Minnie was now crying hysterically, but her mistress, though pale and worried, was calm and purposeful. Her message to the police station was clear and free from needless words.

"You see," she said to her maid when she hung up. "It will be much easier for the detective to solve the mystery if we remain here until he comes. While we are waiting, we will make another search, and—"

The sound of two shots in quick succession came from the garden below. Natalie stood rigid. The maid sank moaning on a settee.

"Something dreadful's happened," she gasped, and her tears fell in real earnest.

Miss Grandon glanced down at the girl with contempt.

"Don't be silly," she snapped. "I only hope it is the beast who took my necklace that is shot."

Minnie lifted a pale, tear-stained face. "But how—" she commenced. "No one could get into the room."

"Don't ask *me* how," retorted Natalie as she went to the window. "That's for the detective to say. All I know is that my collar has gone and if it isn't in this room, the inference is obvious. Possibly some one was on a ladder and reached through the window with a stick.

"I know you couldn't have taken it, and as forty thousand dollars' worth of gems cannot take wings and fly, there must be some reasonable answer. The servants are out now searching the grounds—I can see their flashlights. And here's a car coming up the drive. It must be the detective.

"Quick, Minnie, get my gown while I pin up my hair. I told him to come straight to this room."

True to her instructions, Detective Rossiter entered two minutes after his car had stopped in front of the house. He listened without interruption while Natalie gave a detailed account of what had taken place. Now and again, his eyes drifted casually in the direction of Minnie, who sat huddled on the settee.

"Peculiar," he said when Natalie came to a pause. "H-m, very strange. You say you have searched the floor?"

"Practically everywhere in this room."

"Did you examine your own clothes?"

Miss Grandon flushed slightly. "Do you mean to insinuate that I—"

The detective raised a protesting hand. "I am only suggesting the possibility of an accident," he said. "The collar might have fallen and clung to your dress."

"Then my maid shall search me and satisfy you on that score. It is useless to search, for as I have already told you, she did not once approach the dressing-table after placing the collar there. In fact, she did not move from behind my chair until she went to get my dressing gown.

"Now Minnie, just run your hands over me and see if by any chance I have my own property concealed about my person."

There was a sarcastic note in Miss Grandon's voice as she gave this order and a haughty tilt to her chin, but Rossiter seemed in no wise perturbed, or particularly disappointed when the collar did not show up.

"It disappeared when Minnie fell," he

muttered, staring at the carpet. "Let me see, this room is on the third floor? Was that window open?"

"Just as you see it now."

"No more than that?"

"I has not been moved up or down since I opened it myself," said Natalie.

"And the shots, have you any idea what they meant?"

"No, I have not inquired. I saw that the noise had awakened the servants and they were searching the grounds when you arrived. There! Listen! It seems as if they had found something."

"I'll go down, and see," grunted Rossiter. "Maybe the clue to the mystery is downstairs."

When the detective reached the hall, a body was being carried in by a couple of pallid-faced men servants.

"Shot twice through the head," muttered Rossiter as he bent over the dead man and rapidly searched his pockets. He did not find anything that connected the stranger with the disappearance of the collar, and immediate examination of the flower-beds under Miss Grandon's window showed no trace of footprints, or marks of a ladder.

The spot where the body had been found was some thirty feet distant from the house. Shot from behind, the man evidently had been hiding for some purpose, but the detective traced his footsteps from the road to a clump of bushes where he had been slain.

At that point the dead man's trail ended. He had not been near the house.

All this, and proof that no one had climbed into Miss Grandon's window, the detective verified by daylight. At every new line of plausible explanation he met with a check. No theory fitted the circumstance. There was no clue to be found inside or outside. The collar was gone and the rest was—confusion.

Miss Grandon was above suspicion. The dead man was a doubtful factor, inasmuch that he was found in the grounds, but he had not been near the house and there was nothing to connect his murder with the robbery of the collar.

Natalie herself declared that Minnie had

not approached the dressing-table. What was the answer?

Back in his office, the detective cudgelled his brains. No one had entered the house, none had left it, yet—when Minnie fell, the gems had vanished.

The phrase repeated itself over and over again in the detective's mind. He could not rid himself of the constant repetition of the three simple, silly words.

"She said she tripped up," he muttered. "Over what? I'll go back and look things over again this afternoon. Meanwhile there's a dead man to identify and a murderer to find."

II.

It was late in the afternoon when detective Rossiter reached the Grandon house and he was not altogether displeased to find that Natalie was not at home. The housekeeper showed him into the dressing-room and left him to his own devices.

He made the most of his opportunity of investigating, unhampered by observers. Indeed, if any one had been watching they would have said that Detective Rossiter was anything but a hustler or a keen sleuth. For the greater part of half an hour he sat on the settee with half-closed eyes endeavoring to visualize, to reconstruct the scene.

Then he got up and peered into the bedroom. He saw nothing of note, but he heard something that caused him to wrinkle his brows. It wasn't much, only the sound of low sobbing, but it was enough to send him tiptoeing into the corridor. There he coughed loudly and walked with heavy tread to a door that he judged opened into a room beyond Miss Grandon's.

"I reckon it is the maid's room," he reflected, and observed that when he stood outside the door the sobbing ceased. He knocked and Minnie came to the door. She was red-eyed and there was a look of one bereaved on her face.

"Sorry to disturb you," said the detective, "but would you mind getting me a hammer. Oh, and by the way, do you remember what you tripped over?"

"The carpet. There must have been a ruck in it."

"Ah, yes, of course. That was it. Well, I'll wait in the dressing-room while you go for the hammer."

Rossiter did wait in the dressing-room, but only long enough to ascertain that the carpet was tightly stretched and nailed all round the room, and to give Minnie time to reach the basement. Then he transferred himself with remarkable quickness to the maid's room. Forty-five seconds was the limit of his stay there and when Minnie returned she found him waiting on the settee.

Entirely for the maid's benefit the detective accepted the hammer and solemnly tapped on the walls, and the fact that Minnie sniffed at his futile behavior bothered him not at all.

Before he left the house, Rossiter pledged the housekeeper to secrecy and asked her two questions: When was the oil heater in the maid's room filled? Was it ever used in Miss Grandon's dressing-room?

He learned that the heater had been filled the day before and that according to Natalie's orders it was never placed in her room. Strangely enough the two trivial circumstances caused Rossiter to congratulate himself. He was far from being able to locate the missing collar, and was still laboring in the dark, but he glimpsed a distant, guiding ray of light.

During his visit to the maid's room he had seen by the indicator on the heater that it had been burned several hours. Also he had noticed four telltale curved marks on the soft pile of the carpet near Natalie's dressing table.

"So far, so good," he murmured as he left the house. "Now to look up the history of the man who was shot, and, to play a waiting game."

For three days Rossiter resolutely kept out of communication with Natalie Grandon. On the fourth day he called on the young lady and lugubriously informed her that neither he nor any of the police had any clue or hope of recovering her jeweled collar.

Miss Grandon did not disguise her scorn or indignation and Rossiter received her scathing remarks in humble silence. Even Minnie's smile was superior and disdainful

and she tossed her head with open disparagement when he left the room on an errand for her mistress.

Then in a twinkling, there came a surprising change over the detective. His whispered words caused Natalie to open her eyes in astounded amazement.

"That was a bluff," announced Rossiter. "I have discovered some evidence that may perhaps lead to recovery of your collar. But all depends on your keeping up the pretense that I have given over the case.

"Tell everybody what a fool dumb I am and let it be understood that you have relinquished all hope of getting back your gems. Remember there's forty thousand dollars' worth of jewels that you'll probably never see again if you give the slightest hint of the truth."

A week later, Rossiter traced the man that had been found dead in front of the Grandon house, but although he found that the man's name was Fayette and made some interesting discoveries regarding his antecedents, he failed to connect with the one who had shot him.

While he was thus at a standstill, the one event he had deliberately played for took place. The news came simultaneously to him from one of his watchers and Miss Grandon.

"Minnie's beat it," came the message from the associate detective who had been tipped off to watch the Grandon house.

"My maid has left me," telephoned Miss Grandon.

"Of her own accord?" asked Rossiter.

"Yes, in a way. I discharged her because she insisted on having more money."

The detective smiled as he replaced the receiver.

"So Minnie has found a way of slipping free without giving reason for suspicion," he murmured. "Clever girl, that. She doesn't wait on chance to serve her turn. She don't trip up unless she *means* to fall.

"I wonder if she'll lead where I want to follow? If so and I've doped it out all right, there's some that's been sniggering at me that'll have to hand me a boo-kay.

"There's nothing like letting a chicken think you're an old has-been or a never-waser."

For thirty-six hours following Minnie's departure from the employ of Natalie, she did nothing that gave her watchers any help in support of the theory that Rossiter had formed; but the detective counseled caution and patience.

"She's laying low," he declared when it was reported that Minnie had been to several employment agencies and was hunting a job. "Depend upon it that a woman who had self-control enough to hide her feelings on the night that Fayette was shot, is not likely to give herself away by doing anything in a hurry.

"When I found her crying in her room I had my doubts about her doubled, and since we now have proof that she was Fayette's wife, I guess it is worth while giving her all the rope she wants. I know she put that heater in Miss Grandon's room, and although I haven't the least idea where that collar went to, it's a million dollars to a peanut shell that Minnie Fayette had her finger in the pie.

"If we arrest her on suspicion, she'll play dumb, and we'll lose the goods. Let her rip. It is an even chance that she's after revenge and that connects us with the guy who finished Fayette."

Soon word came from Rossiter's shadows, that the moment was ripe for him to get on the job.

III.

By nine o'clock on the evening of the second day, the mystery of the vanished collar was solved. With the jewels in his pocket and three prisoners, Rossiter arrived at the station house and told his story. And as he had successively bagged the murderer of Fayette, a receiver of stolen goods, and Minnie, he was listened to with absorbed interest.

"This woman here," he stated, pointing to Minnie Fayette, "engineered the whole business. After I received the message that she was trailing round hangouts that are not usually frequented by lady's maids I picked up her trail and followed her to this man's house. I heard her accuse him of killing her husband but he—"

"I did it in self-defense," cried the younger of the two men. Fayette wouldn't

pass on the collar as we'd agreed. I grabbed his gun and—"

"Shut up," snapped Rossiter, "you can tell your yarn later. All that I care about now is the fact that you killed Fayette, sloped with the collar and cashed it with this old fence here. You're all in the soup and the judge 'll fix the responsibility where it belongs."

The detective turned again to the lieutenant. "There was a whole lot of talk between Minnie and this man," he continued, "but to cut it short it amounted to her agreeing to accept half what the receiver had promised her husband's murderer."

"I tagged after them when they went to the fence's place. They all started squealing, one on the other, when I showed up, and here they are. All merry and bright. This"—the detective laid the collar on the lieutenant's desk—"I found in the receiver's house; and these—a gun, and this ball of fish-line—were hidden in the other feller's room. It explains a good deal that fogged us. Have a look at it and you'll see how they got away with that collar."

"Cute," murmured the lieutenant as he unwound the ball and examined the string. "Well, you'd better cut along to Miss Grandon. You can tell us the rest later. I guess we can take care of these beauties until you get back."

Although the jeweled collar was held pending the prosecution of Minnie and the others, Natalie Grandon was graciousness itself and lavish in her praise of the detective's keenness and patience.

"From beginning to end," said the detective after he had given the details of the gradual building up of his suspicions "it was one of those rare cases that are well thought out and baffle by their very simplicity. Every move you made was forced upon you when you returned from the opera."

"There are the marks of the heater that Minnie kept in your room until just before you were due. She was no more sleepy than I am. It was a plant to practically compel you to open the window yourself. If you had not done so, Minnie would have had to do it herself, or, they would have

waited for another chance. The fact that you did it, lessened the possibility of connecting her with the robbery."

"But how was it I didn't see the string? I distinctly remember that there was nothing on the corner of my dressing table when that wicked girl took off my collar."

"I'll show you," said Rossiter. "In the first place, you must remember you had no suspicions and therefore had no reason for looking closely. I doubt even now that you know how you were tricked, if you will be able to see the snare that was laid ready for the moment that had been foreseen by Fayette and his wife."

While we were talking the detective went to the window and threw out the ball of fish line. As it curved downward, the ball unwound and fell within a yard of the spot where Fayette had waited for the collar and—for death. The line hung straight down the side of the house and when Rossiter closed the window the remaining length of painted string blended with the wall and carpet.

"Why, it is barely noticeable!" exclaimed Natalie. "You are right, I would certainly fail to see it unless I knew it were there."

"Then how about this?" asked Rossiter as he brought the string up the back of the dressing-table. "You can see what is knotted at the end of the string now?"

"A piece of catgut."

The detective nodded. "Now look," he said as he laid the loop of catgut flat on the lace cover.

"It is almost invisible!" cried Miss Grandon. "Then Minnie had only to slip my collar through the loop and fasten the catch."

"Of course, and the sound of your collar as it was jerked away was entirely covered by the noise that was made when Minnie fell. The racket was bound to make you turn round, and her scream was the signal for her confederate to haul away."

"That was the crucial moment, but Minnie didn't trip or stub her toe by accident, for there was no crease or ruck in the carpet. That little lie she told helped some. The marks of the heater helped some more, and the rest—was easy."

Janie and the Waning Glories

by Raymond S. Spears

Author of "Janie Pays a Debt of Honor," "Dancing Laura," "A Shortage in Perfumes," etc.

(A "JANIE FRETE" STORY)

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BATTLE.

SHERIFF PLACARD had divided his little army into several posses, and sent them into the Waning Glory breaks by different routes, to sweep the country for the cattle-stealers, or for traces of them. The forces of the law—of the common public sentiment against the independents, who were outlaws, and for that reason desperadoes—had the advantage of numbers, but were at a disadvantage of working against the hiding craft of the rustlers.

Until Placard and his own posse rode over the ridge and looked down upon that astonishing, that amazing herd in the long valley which hardly one of them had ever heard of, let alone seen, they had no idea of what they were seeking, except that it was a little band of cattle-thieves.

Sheriff Placard, conscious of the necessity of routing out the Waning Glory breaks bandits, with their long record of crimes unpunished, had made what was supposed to be a mere little foray against owned cattle the occasion of a real man-hunt—to the finish. In this a number of urgent forces had joined—the protectors and avengers of banks endangered by hold-ups, the police forces of railroads, whose trains were occasionally stopped and looted, express companies who hated the pilferers of stages, mine-camp hullyon-carriers, and

special express-cars, and ranches whose horse and cattle herds had suffered depredations.

This was to be a round-up of the thieves, and their reputed rendezvous, away back in the Waning Glory breaks, was to be visited, surrounded, and the battle of extermination fought up to the log cabin doors, or to the entrance of their cave in the mountain, or wherever they happened to be cornered.

Accordingly, posses and men-hunters, including some few adventurous independents seeking a look-in on the inevitable distribution of rewards, were converging from several directions, and if it happened that Sheriff Placard was the first to strike into the raiders, within the radius were other groups of men, equally eager to come upon the banded outlaws.

Within a few miles, therefore—a few miles, speaking in the desert sense—were trackers and searchers dragging the wide country for sign or sight of the human quarry. While Placard was rushing headlong with his own little group into the cunning ambushade of the desperate Sugar, others were looking with astonishment at that most unexpected display of the prowess and unspeakable nerve of the desperadoes.

"They've stolen the herd!" Chief Artent, of the Transmissouri Empire Railroad detective force, laughed shortly. "Well, I'll be—"

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for May 15.

With him were only three other men, like himself, wage-paid men-hunters. They didn't rush pell-mell down out of their observatory, all in a flurry to come upon the herd and its well-guarded flanks. Instead, they all turned and looked up the valley in the direction in which the animals were moving, calculating with broad, Western experience, what the probable movements would be during the rest of that day and that coming night, and into the following hours of sunshine.

They dismounted behind the crest of the ridge they had climbed from the east, and, sitting down to a cold snack, talked it over while they ate. They talked an hour, lying back leisurely, while their horses found comfort in some little tufts of grass near by. Every minute or two, one or other would look down at the herd, miles distant, and, coming back, make some little comment:

"They're tending right to business—they're in a hurry!" was their united belief.

They studied the lay of their own land to the northward, and when they moved on it was in the direction the herd was going, over a rough and difficult course, and they had no doubt but what they were going faster than the herd, which was southwest of them. When they looked over the crest toward the herd they removed their hats and raised their heads behind some bush or between rocks—no need to warn them against showing themselves silhouetted against the sky-line with such game as that riding herd down there in the valley.

They saw a man on horseback come out of their own side of the valley and ride to join the herders; that was a phenomenon to be studied; this man had two horses, riding one and driving the other ahead—and that other had a saddle on it. The railroad detectives asked one another if there hadn't already been shooting away down south, somewhere, with an empty saddle to show for it? They didn't know; they could only surmise.

If they watched the herd, they also lost no track of their other surroundings; they read, with practised eyes, signs in the cattle trails they crossed in riding to head the

herd in the valley outlet gap. Here were tracks of cattle that had been driven down into the valley from the east. They even found a bunch of cattle in a valley they followed for several miles—strays, they figured, from the cattle-thieves' loot, or animals that hadn't been able to travel fast enough to satisfy the raiders.

"They shore brought 'em far back!" Chief Artent remarked. "Must be twenty-five miles, as the crows fly—Y-R brands, and some double-headed Serpents, too. Where the devil 'd that brand come from, anyhow?"

"Old cuss name of Marvel—same one they named the ranch after—patented that brand," one of the others replied. "He was p'isen himself, coming in from South Dakota when it got too hot for him. So he took that brand. It was kind of a warning, but the snake-heads is lost their fangs."

"Looks like. Look 't that herd!"

"Like old times—in Texas after the war," Artent continued. "Then they took what they found—there's more 'n two thousand there—did those fools think they could get away with them?"

"Looks like," a morose man-hunter shook his head, adding: "S'posin' this was last week?"

"Or day before yesterday," Artent looked toward the gap in the mountains. "Yes, or yesterday, or last night. 'Tain't so fur to that door in the range!"

"How wide's it?" one asked. "Just a cañon, that's all."

"Comin' down, we crossed that range, to the eastward," Artent remarked. "That's close by. H-m."

So they speculated, as they rode along, sparing their horses the best they could, but determined to head the desperadoes and the herd. Suddenly they rode right out into another group of men, who had come down out of the east.

They stopped, short and ready. The two parties, their weapons aqiver, searched one another; then Artent threw back his coat, and his badge gleamed visibly. He had seen a flash on another chest across the interval. He rode over to them, and a minute later the other followed suit.

Briefly, word was exchanged. Then Artent took one of the other group up to a crest and showed him the spectacle over in the big valley.

"Well, by the love o' Hades!" the other gasped. "What d'ye make o' that?"

Artent laughed shortly. The two rode back, and the leader of the newcomers told his followers in flowery oaths what he had seen; then they all loped along northward, Artent leading, the others following.

"I'm damned glad yo' come, undersheriff," Artent said sincerely. "I hadn't any longing to get into them with just us. Now we're—"

No need to complete the sentence. They traveled fast, and they kept looking down at the herd, which was quickening, as the cattle smelled water out of the northward, there in the cañon gap in the range. But it was a tired herd, at that—the herders were leaving strays behind them, animals that couldn't keep up the pace and calves that were too weak to follow in the drive.

With ten men, Artent's project was less desperate, and he drove faster, getting his men ahead of the herd, so that as the afternoon waned he was ahead of them, and at sunset he boldly ran down into the plain and across the head of the herd, with all his men stretched out behind him.

He had won the race—the legal authorities had come into their own—and, charging in upon the bold drivers, they rode to give battle in the open, feeling that with their fresher horses, and the vengeance of the law behind, the desperadoes must quail and count the odds.

The rustlers saw what they were up against, and they all rode up to the point where Snowflake and Dishpan were in the way of the attack. Tarcass came through the herd from the other point, and the six men stood for a minute during the breathless dash of the exultant posse who had their quarry out there in the open, on tired horses and with no cover.

Some one fired from a running horse; instantly others began to shoot; the desperadoes replied for a number of seconds, and then as Dishpan and Tarcass lurched down from their saddles, the others turned and fled. They bumped into the cattle of

the herd; Sugar, his own horse shot from hip to shoulder by a 30-30 bullet, leaped to the back of a lank steer, a wild maverick, and the animal, mad with terror, dashed westward, Sugar bull-frogging him, and hanging on until they were beyond the herd, when, taking off his hat, the fish-eyed youth waved a weird, wild farewell.

The devil's own, Burke, was hit again by a bullet, but disappeared in the night, while the horsemen raced at his very heels; Snowflake, his horse shot under him, rose with his pistols in each hand, to fight—and he did fight till the bullets that hit him broke him down and he fainted where he sagged.

Another band of bandits had been broken up, of whom only two had gotten clear away—Burke and Sugar; but Burke was bleeding, and probably couldn't survive. When the bloody seconds had been passed, the posse turned to succor its own wounded—three, and two dead. That was added to the price paid to destroy this gang.

When they had bound up the wounds and caught the horses, to tether them till they could move on, Artent and Undersheriff Plickner looked over the spoils of their united efforts—a glance at the herd of cattle, and a good examination of the four desperadoes, two of whom were dead.

"Well, by the Lord Harry!" one of the White Face Cattle Ranch men cried. "If here ain't Janie Frete's whole outfit!"

Then, and not till then, did the victors discern the significance of their discovery.

"Janie Frete's outfit?" Plickner turned to the cowboy. "Sure of that?"

"Ain't that the hoss she rode, come we met her an' that fellow there—Tarcass?" The cowboy turned to his slower-witted side-partner, the only two from Grisp's outfit.

"That's right—Tarcass an'—an Snowflake, they called him!"

The horses of the desperadoes confirmed the suspicion. Their brands were mussed up so badly as to be almost illegible. Big Teeth, dead now, was without any brand.

The battle had not passed unnoticed in that valley of vast views; within two hours another posse rode in, angry because it had not been in range for the fight. A sage-

brush and cedar-trunk fire brought in others, till dawn, when more than forty men had arrived, and as they began to turn the herd back in the morning, some one discerned a lone figure in the distance, a mere speck to look at, but one that made many antics in the mirage of the valley.

The flock resolved itself into a man on foot, upon which several rode out to round him up—they found Valero, choking and staggering, thirsty and hungry, his feet raw in his shoes, hatless and without firearms—a frightened and miserable man.

And out of the hills struggled Sheriff Placard and the remainder of his posse—to seek help, now that the desperadoes had been worsted. They had ridden in to the defense, and had their dead and wounded to bring in. But if there were dead men, and suffering wounded, these were nothing compared to the visible evidence of the success of the raid into the rendezvous of the Waning Glory breaks desperadoes.

There were nearly three thousand head of cattle, and sight of them refreshed even the famished heart of Tremaine Valero. He saw their white faces and their bodies, deep with beef. His beef—and Uintah's!

The herd was worth more than two hundred thousand dollars—and that would satisfy the woman. Having eaten and drank coffee, Valero was sufficiently recovered to ride one of the desperado's horses. He waxed generous. He promised all the posse "something"; he calculated in his narrow soul, however, how little he could give them and not be called mean.

He heard, with pleasure, that the rewards on the heads of the captured or killed desperadoes would go up to several hundred dollars per member of the posse—Sheriff Placard's and the independents who had appeared to that hour. A thousand dollars, he figured, would let him out.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE WANING GLORY HERO.

IN the mean while Sheriff Placard, Chief Artent, and the under-sheriff rode apart and discussed the situation and the bits of information that had come to them.

That information was amazing. Janie Frete's ranch had been for a month the rendezvous of the bandits; they had come there to work, and their now dead foreman, Tarcass, was beyond question Daries Flange, the man who had murdered Asra Clement over in the country south of Salt Lake, in the desert there. He answered the description, and in his saddle were the initials "D. F.," and the saddle otherwise answered the description in the notice of reward sent out by Clement's friends.

The indications were not to be ignored, and accordingly Sheriff Placard, Chief Artent, Valero, as owner, and four good men left the herd and struck through the breaks ahead of the main group of men. Ostensibly, they were going out to get assistance for the wounded men, especially medical and surgical care. In fact, they had what was at least as important a part of their errand, from the legal viewpoint.

They rode as fast as they could on their worn horses, but they felt little fear of being out-traveled. They rode, as straight as they could, with what information they had about the lay of the land, till they looked down upon the two-day spring pass. There they stumbled out into the plain of Thirsty Creek Valley, and turned southward, at quickening pace, to Janie Frete's ranch.

It was night, but bright moonlight. They left their horses and surrounded the place, so that they could cover it from all directions. Dawn was just come when they had completed their ambushes. Then Placard and Artent rode boldly up to the front door and hailed, and immediately the front door opened, and Screaming Eagle stepped out.

"What!" She stared at the sheriff, and the two men rushed up past her and into the sitting-room.

There, sitting on the floor, was Janie Frete holding the head of Burke, the wounded outlaw.

Burke was just beyond their power, though a grin flickered over his countenance as he looked up at the sheriff and the chief detective, who with four guns waving were keeping one eye on him and peering into the other rooms.

"Too late, Placard!" Burke whispered. "I got here—first."

That was all. The man, conscious and taunting the law to the last, shook loose from his body with its hundred old scars and fresh wounds.

Placard stood looking from the dead man to Janie, who till this moment had remained dry-eyed. Now her tears flowed, but nevertheless she gazed at the sheriff with a directness that was embarrassing.

"Too late!" Placard ejaculated. "Huh—I reckon not! We got you—too late!"

Screaming Eagle divined the meaning of that phrase first, and sprang before the sheriff with her hands raised and her fingers drawn up like eagle claws. The sheriff stepped back hastily and turned his brutal guns on her, whereupon she laughed:

"Shoot a woman! Shoot a woman!"

"Bring in the others," Placard said to Artent, who, stepping outside, shouted up to the ambushed men.

Valero hurried up, limping, and when he entered upon the tableau in Janie's sitting-room before the fireplace, he straightened rather importantly and gazed with stern expression at the young woman and at the man lying dead there.

"Well," he remarked, "seems to me you've gotten into big business out here rather promptly."

"And you?" Janie inquired softly.

Valero, for reply, blinked. It was part of his creed that looking and acting importantly meant half the battle in business. The other half depended on being ready, and with a sudden thought he felt in his inner pocket. The wallet was there; also, getting his back to those present, by the window, he assured himself that the slip of paper which gave him the ownership of the Trenal brand cattle was safe in its little pocket.

For a few minutes the new arrivals gathered their breaths, and then Placard thought of something:

"Say—we want to send out a car to bring in surgeons!"

"I beg pardon," Janie interrupted. "That's already done. I sent one of my men in my car to Racklack hours ago. I knew—men were wounded."

"Which man?" Placard demanded.

"Chippy," she replied scornfully, standing erect now. "What of *him*? Do you want—do you know *him*?"

"I don't know—but I'd like a look 't him," Placard replied grimly.

Janie had done many things that morning after, in the early hours. Burke had come in with the story of the bloody fights over in the Waning Glory breaks. He had come, knowing now that he was dying, to warn her. He had urged her to go into flight, because on her would fall the opprobrium of having become a member of the desperado band.

"We was afeared of that," Burke had said. "But we took a chanst—an' lost. You see—"

With terse desert English he told her their great plan, and how they had gathered that herd over in the valley, where they could drive it out for her and ship it—and she would have a stack of money to show for her efforts to come back again, having fought so hard. They could appreciate that, those desperadoes, falsely accused in the beginning, but not bad, and glad of it, with no liking for anything else.

"Wa'nt hit a good joke?" he had pleaded, as he saw Janie's thoughtful face upon that revelation that her own cattlemen had stripped the plains of Thirsty Creek Valley, and brought down on the Waning Glory bandits the wrath of the Marvelando and White Face cattle companies. One other thing he had told her, too, which she did not on the instant grasp in its full meaning.

"You'd have me laugh—with you—you!" Janie had cried.

"Smile, Janie!" he had pleaded. "Jes' smile—so's I'll know—the boys 'll know you understand? We 'lowed to favor yo', Janie—an'—an— Sh!"

He had heard the coming of the sheriff and his companion; he had reached to draw his guns, but Janie had stopped that. And Janie had smiled on him and kissed him—assured him that she understood—which she did not, quite, but would not have him know her feelings of predicament and uncertainty. Then the sheriff and Artent had entered.

Janie, having paused to send Chippy for surgeons, had also ordered the Indian's wagon hitched up and the Indians to go to bring in the wounded men, Screaming Eagle telling her that they would know where to go to meet the coming cortege and hospital hand.

"Why not the truck?" Janie asked. "Over the Waniug Breaks Road the boys know about?"

Accordingly, the motor truck was sent by the secret road out into the Waning Glories, over which the bandits had brought in the ranch supplies, including the truck—to the mystification of the Marvelando outfit, who had seen no truck track in the road they knew to Janie's ranch.

"You're a prisoner, of course," Placard assured Janie, who made no least comment; but Valero found opportunity to talk with her, off to one side.

"Now, my fine lady," he remarked, after the squinting-eyed confidence of his kind, "you see what you're up against, queen of these Waning Glory bandits, and rounding up my cattle under cover of your ranch here. But I've no hard feelings; you're a pretty high stepper, and all that. Out here we like good-lookers, and we go easy, as a rule, on times like these.

"Now, if you'll just say the word, I'll have a little talk with Placard, and we'll enable you to play the innocent victim, and all that. See? What say, eh, girl?"

He reached to rest his hand on Janie's knee, with a familiarity that, to him, seemed the finest of friendly symptoms. But Janie said, softly:

"You touch me, you scoundrel, and I'll blow your brains out!"

That was all. Valero was frozen in his gesture. He realized, on the instant, that though Janie was a prisoner, she had not yet been searched. That a bandit queen must inevitably have a revolver or pistol handy was a foregone conclusion.

At the same time his wrath was raised to the highest power of his expression; he had offered Janie an opportunity to escape the penalty of her association with the desert band of criminals, by what seemed to him to be a rather complimentary association with himself.

"All right!" he sniffed. "Then I'll—"

"You'll think twice," Janie interrupted. "You'll think twice, and the second time you'll think right."

"Huh!" he grinned, but the careless look in his greed-faded eyes almost immediately changed as he added: "What do you mean?"

"I mean the law of the land," she replied, and thereupon he did not laugh, but shuddered.

"That's with me!" he declared harshly. "You know it!"

"Do you?" she asked, and left him to go into the kitchen, there to help Screaming Eagle get the breakfast which she had ordered for the newcomers, while the sheriff and his posse, at her suggestion, brought down the cots and prepared the hungalow for the work to come. They made a hospital of it, and in that work there was no division in the people there.

They had that first task of all to attend to—the succor of the injured men who were coming, slowly and with such terrible pains as the men wounded in the depths of pathless desert must endure before they come at last to some ranch and into the hands of surgeons.

The injured and the dead were brought in toward the end of that day, and the Racklack doctor was there to attend to them. A little later the Greengrass surgeons arrived, with the ambulance not far behind.

The surgery was the best available, and during that difficult task Janie and Screaming Eagle toiled with the doctors, good women and even quite experienced in such an emergency; Screaming Eagle had tended gunshot wounds before, and Janie knew their horrible look.

But the herd did not arrive till after all these things, and as Janie had been indispensable to the wounded men Sheriff Placard had not attempted to take her on to Racklack and around to his own court town.

The stolen herd, now salvaged, came down out of the Waning Glories, with more than thirty men driving them—a wonderful sight. All hands, including Snowflake, got out to see the spectacle, and

Sheriff Placard would not have missed it himself.

He and Valero and Chief Artent rode out to meet it, and they returned on the points, Valero with his broad-brimmed hat aslant, and with such a feeling of ownership and importance as never had sat upon him before.

"Three thousand head!" he blinked. "I can hardly believe it."

"Say, Valero," Placard hailed him, after looking the cattle over rather generally and particularly, "I was just noticing—the boys were remarking—these here cows is all branded with Horned-A's."

- CHAPTER XXXIX.

VALERO PLAYS A TRUMP.

IT was a fact; riding along with nearly twoscore men to 3,000 head of cattle—the largest stolen herd seen in many a day out there—the men of the posses had not failed to notice the cattle and their brands; and before long it was said that they were mostly Horned-A's, and then they said, by the gee-whiz, the only animals that weren't Horned-A's were calves that hadn't been branded or had been freshly branded with Y-R in the Bitrings, or with the familiar snake-brand of the Marvelando ranch.

Instantly a rumor, a surmise supported by the hints of some of the White Face cattle ranch cowmen, indicated that these cattle were all the Trenal herd, and "nobody knows who owns them." The doubt that settled upon the posse herders was with them when Sheriff Placard, Valero, and Chief Artent rode out, leaving guards at the ranch to make sure that Janie Frete didn't make a break to get away.

Placard, a doubt now in his own soul, with a vision that always lurks like a nightmare over a sheriff's office, turned to Valero, worried by a contingency that was like iron in his own soul.

Valero didn't answer, as he mustered the proper expression and the nonbalance needed for such an occasion—the mustering proving a rather difficult thing to do.

"Look here, Valero," Placard urged—

"look what we've done to those boys—Trenal ranch boys, that was herding Trenal's cattle? How about it?"

A second thought had settled upon the sheriff's soul, sensitive in that direction, and he continued aloud to Valero:

"How about it, man? Why—goshamighty! If they're— There's for me a hundred-thousand-dollar damage suit! See that? Her cowboys—if she hired 'em in good faith, not knowing—"

"Why worry?" Valero turned to him, rather grandly, and with that he reached over the paper, which indicated that Trenal had further protected the mortgage on his ranch by a conveyance and quitclaim on the cattle belonging to the ranch.

Reading it, Placard handed it to the detective chief, Artent, who also read it. Placard wiped the sweat from his forehead, greatly relieved to have that so satisfactorily over with.

They brought the cattle slowly down the valley to the neighborhood of the ranch buildings, and Valero, white-faced and blue-lipped with the tense hour that was his, scowling and his face drawn as he steeled himself to this thing that he was doing, saw Janie walking down her steps and out to meet them. By her side bobbed Snowflake, the wounded man, who, whatever his wounds, had come along to stand by the woman who had employed him.

"Sheriff," he began, "me 'n' the boys knowed those cattle belonged to Trenal, and we cut out every White Face cattle and Marvelando brand in the whole valley—knowing what to expect. Some calves got through, branded by those fellows, Valero here, and Grisp's men—but branded out of their mothers' brands.

"They can't deny it—stealing Trenal's herd as fast as they could! Why the hell did you brand them calves off their mothers' brands? You, Valero—why 'd you do it?"

Snowflake, a big, burly man, stretched up to his full height, pale with the loss of blood, and indignant with his whole soul, put the question to Valero—of all questions the one that every listener knew he must answer there and then.

Placard and Artent, especially, stared at

him, astounded. Valero flushed and shriveled up visibly. His already agitated soul had heaped upon it a greater burden—and he glanced about, to find that on him was fixed the questioning, direct Western gaze in all its various phases.

"They were mine—they were ours!" he cried. "To do as we damned pleased with!"

He raised aloft his little slip of paper. He turned to the sheriff and said, his voice rising to an excited shriek:

"Here! Here! Read 'em this! Read 'em this! That 'll show 'em!"

Placard, in his best political-stump-speaking tone, read the brief but comprehensive document. Valero tried to recover his equilibrium, but the listeners sniffed. By this time they had all heard, from the cowboys, about the branding of Trenal calves out in the way places of range—like the work of professional maverickers.

Valero's statement might go—but his appearance belied it. Looking at him, and then at Janie Frete, accused of aiding and abetting the theft of Trenal's herd—with the stalwart, if badly wounded Snowflake beside her—if there was any sympathy in the matter, there was no doubt as to where the sympathy rested.

But the law is law, which does not change with the local waves of public sentiment, however ardent, but follows the slow and deliberate tidal change of general custom and national habit. Valero had, with his little slip of paper, invoked the law of the land, and if he and his kind had been sneaking out and branding calves to enrich the herds of two ranches by impoverishing the third herd, it was his own affair, even though it had involved a whole desert region in the calamity of a desperado chase, and the running down of a handit gang—real bandits, apparently.

Being bandits, the dead Burke, the dead Tarcass, the two half-breeds, also dead, and this ghostly Snowflake—whoever he was—their employer, Janie Frete, stood among them all, a slender, gentle young woman, hostess of all the men-hunters and their wounded, but the employer of that wild crew whose exploit was now the wonder, and the mystery, of the whole affair.

They had gathered all of Irving Trenal's herd, cut out all the cattle belonging to the two neighboring ranches, and would in another day have carried them out of the whole range—a clear getaway in spite of the frantic search that had been inaugurated when Bleak Grisps discovered that those cattle were gone. Bleak was dead; he could not tell what surmise had been in his head, whether he had known that only the Trenal cattle were part of that herd.

Despite the slip of paper, and its assurance that they had not rounded up as criminals, killing them, the employees of an innocent rancher, there was a feeling in the united posse that there was something very wrong in the whole affair. Sheriff Placard took the widely experienced railroad man, Chief Detective Artent, to one side and discussed the matter with him, as the best available authority.

"Leave it to Valero, put it right up to him" the detective suggested, tartly. "It's his mess; let him clean it or lie in it."

Accordingly, Placard went to Valero, and put it up to him.

"Look here, Valero," he said, "you're the complainant in this case, being as you are agent and owner of the White Face Cattle Company and Marvelando Company outfits; what do you want done with her—Miss Frete?"

"What's your duty in regard to desperadoes caught stealing cattle?" Valero turned on him, catching the drift of the sheriff's demand.

"Mister Man," Placard replied. "your agent, Bleak Grisp, summoned me, saying cattle had been stolen. You came in and rode the range, hunting them. You were the complainant, and you are the plaintiff and prosecuting witness, right now. Who do you accuse of stealing your cattle?"

Valero was cornered. Placard had brought up several good and reliable witnesses, so as to make his own position clear—Valero saw that. For a minute he considered his predicament; knowing what he did, seeing the circle of listeners, and with a covert glance toward the bungalow, he controlled his voice, and with deliberation, shaking his head up and down to emphasize his words, he said:

"I accuse this whole damned outfit here, from the woman down, of stealing my cattle, harboring outlaws and desperadoes, and—and of plotting and doing murder. Now, sheriff, can you ask any more than that?"

"Yes," Placard said. "Just write that all down, and make it plain."

Valero flinched. He cowered before that final and ultimate clinching of his statement; it had been easy to utter the words, but when Sheriff Placard handed him a blank page in a note-book, his hands shook so that he could barely force himself, in strained and jagged penmanship, to write the formal information that would bring into the courts, through the sheriff's immediate action, the later action of the Grand Jury sitting in a criminal case, and then the trial, Janie Frete and the surviving members of the outfit which she had gathered about her in the ranch.

But Valero was desperate; every step he had taken had involved him deeper and deeper, and now, he fancied, he must see it through. Accordingly, with his fountain pen he wrote what he already had said, and signed his name to it, turning from the sheriff on his heel with an indignation that caused the politician to wonder if he had not been overcareful of his own skin in treating in that way the owner of many acres, many cattle, and holding none knew how much influence. Nevertheless, the written accusation cleared the sheriff in what must prove to be a most difficult situation.

He went to Janie Frete and showed her the statement.

"You see, Miss Frete," he said apologetically, "I just got to do it!"

"I see," she said, like a tired girl. "I suppose so—but those boys didn't mean to get me into this trouble. They're wounded—you'll give them the best care? We'll go in my car—if you wish."

Janie turned and looked at the ranch; it was a beautiful place, and with all those posse men, with the cattle, with Screaming Eagle glaring about her defiant, and Snowflake sitting in a half faint on the porch steps of the bungalow, the scene was wonderful; that her truck was already moving southward along the plain bound to Rack-

lack with the dead, but made the moment more dramatic.

Those Westerners gazed at her with immobile countenances, but with the odd light in their eyes that men have when they find themselves excusing or even approving the daring flights of a charming woman's imagination. Janie had played for a big stake, they all felt, and she had lost out by only a fraction—another night and the three thousand Trenal cattle must have been beyond the mountain gap, and the searchers been satisfied with the scattered animals from the White Face and Marvelando ranches.

There was the Trenal herd, and if they sympathized with Janie, they scorned Valero; they had seen him walk in, worn down by his adventures, and they had been witness to the petty branding of calves out of the mother Cows' brands. That was a fact that ownership of the Trenal herd could not wholly explain. The cowboys who had worked with Bleak Gris and on the White Face Cattle Company ranch all knew that something was wrong.

But none of these things settled their convictions so thoroughly as the venom of Valero's present attitude toward the woman. Whatever she was, even if she had been queen of the Waning Glory Break band of desperadoes, not one of the cattle taken but had the Trenal brand—and every one knew that Janie Frete had inherited that ranch, subject to the hundred-thousand-dollar mortgage.

Valero had told the story, and the papers in the county clerk's office told the story when other land speculators had thought to take up the ranch, in view of the failure of any heir to appear in person or by attorney. Trust them to know the conditions covering such a property as Trenal's! A hundred thousand dollars was not too high a price to pay for that land.

CHAPTER XL.

"SHE'S DONE LIT OUT."

IT was, after all, too late to start on that day for Racklack. Too much had been done, and it would be better to wait over a night, the surgeons agreed, for one of the

wounded man. Accordingly, Janie was permitted to return to her position as hostess.

"Oh, Mr. Valero," she asked, "will you sell me one of those yearlings? My—ah—house-party is rather an unexpected drain on my larder."

Valero hesitated! Janie turned on her heel, spoke to Chippy, who had returned from carrying the message for the surgeons, though he knew it meant facing the music—but with Janie!

"I forgot—kill one of my own maverick brands, won't you?"

Valero had claimed all the animals—but the rustlers had branded for her nearly a hundred head. Chippy could not get to a horse quickly enough. Every man with a rope turned to the herd and four animals were brought out instant. Chippy picked one of these—one of Janie's own little herd!

There was beef for the guests of the Waning Glory ranch, and no thanks to the tar-witted and harassed Valero, for now it was said that he wouldn't even let the woman he was hounding feed the posse that had saved him two hundred thousand dollars' worth of beef and breeder cattle.

Valero couldn't understand the feeling of ostracism that had fallen upon him. There he was, chief of all that gathering of hand-dit hunters—the man most concerned in the whole affair, speaking financially—and they all were waiting upon the wan smile of the woman, that young woman queen of desperadoes, and letting him shift for himself!

No one would talk to Valero, no one would stand by till he came up to talk on his own hook, and when the beef had been water cooled, and Janie's Indians were barbecuing it, with potatoes in a huge scalding kettle, and coffee in several pails, Valero saw the coming of sunset with a feeling of dread he had never known before. He had tried to move the cavalcade on to the Marvelando, but the horses were too tired, and his heartlessness toward the wounded brought another rebuke. Valero had broken every rule of etiquette; and the sage, the alkali, the very mountain ranges rebuked him.

On the other hand, Janie Frete had with utmost care preserved her exact decorum; after that little episode with Valero, who

had offered her an escape for a price, she took her pistol to Placard, and gave it to him. She had shown him the stock of ammunition, and with a little laugh, given him one of the 22 automatic pistols.

"'Tisn't much, sheriff," she smiled. "My boys practiced with that kind—had lots of fun with them; won't you borrow it, yourself, till I come clear?"

Placard bit his lip under his heavy mustache; he hated this rôle he was obliged to play, but he accepted the loan, and went around showing the others that pretty little trick of a gun, and when they tried a few shots with it, everybody had to take a whack, and there was a regular shooting match with the 22 long-rifle shells.

They even had Janie over there, to shoot a few shots, and when at ninety feet, she hit a fifty-cent piece with every shot but one in a clip—in six seconds time—there was a gasp.

"It's well you weren't riding with your outfit!" one remarked, and in the rebuking silence of the men who heard that comment, Janie replied:

"Oh—but I'd been riding, if I'd known"—her voice caught—"what my boys were doing for me! You don't think, for a minute, that I wouldn't have been, do you?"

"She didn't know?" every man asked himself. "By gad—if she had a known!"

They went and asked the rather mysterious Snowflake about that phase of the matter—confidentially, and as man to man. Snowflake confirmed it. He wouldn't talk about himself, and he refused to admit that he was one of the old Blue Mountain and northern New Mexico desperadoes, but he frankly declared that they had all ridden for Janie, doing their best for her.

"But we were fools." Snowflake shook his head. "We vowed to save a herd for her, out of the Trenal brand pickings. She didn't know a thing about it—we'll all swear the same thing, if you don't string us up on general principles. After her trial, course, we ain't no expectations of nothing."

"There won't be no necktie party," the sheriff assured him. "It beats me, this whole blamed business! It'll take a Philadelphia lawyer to settle in court."

"I want to sit on her jury, sheriff!" a

bystander exclaimed. "You can fix it, you know you can!"

Placard grinned. "We got to send to Carson City for talesmen, I expect—account of bias," he said.

Night fell, and bonfires, around which men sat talking, were flaring between the bungalow and fence, where the yard was. Valero, walking up and down nervously, found himself desperate in his loneliness.

He met Deputy Sheriff Plickner, whom he knew well of old. Him he led away beyond the firelight circles. Plickner went unwillingly, but could not refuse.

"Look here," Valero choked, "I want you to do me a favor, understand? I can't let anybody know—how much I think of that girl, see? Janie! But, good God, man! I can't see her in this fix!"

"My car's yon side the corral—I've run it over there. Just tip her off—tank's full of gas, oil—everything's ready! There's a thousand dollars in the side pocket. Plickner—old boy! This is personal—won't you give her the word—so's she won't fear a bullet comin'? You know—women are 'fraid of guns—I'll take the blame—"

"What! Eh—sure, old boy! I knew—I couldn't believe you hadn't no sense of gallantry—that you couldn't help but see—I was just feeling that away myself about her! Why, she'd never be convicted, any way!"

So Plickner drifted around, up and down, as much as though he hadn't anything on his mind as could be, under the circumstances. Placard had put up to him the guarding of the young woman; the living members of the outfit, including the wagon-schooner Indians, were of course now in chains and under guard of riflemen.

"Say—Miss Frete!" Plickner whispered to her at an opportune moment, "in case you don't know the lay of the land, that fool Valero's left his gas wagon around yon side the corral; there's a thousand dollars in the right-han' side-pocket, if you're broke.

"I'm just telling you, understand? I got my eye on you, every second, course; that's my duty; but—well, hit's night. If you ain't a tenderfoot, out here, then you're so bright it ain't no use—lots of gas

an' oil, an' there's a grub stake there, too—hunk of eatin', and water-bottles."

She caught his hand in both hers.

"You dear, big goose!" she exclaimed. "Don't you know—I just couldn't go away and leave you? I am a tenderfoot—really! But I just love you—all of you!"

"Why, nine of these dear boys have been to me already and told me—told me just what to do! And some 'd go with me and show me the way, too—"

"The sons of guns!" Plickner grumbled. "Who—I'll—"

"Sh-h!" she lowered the voice. "Even the under sheriff is a perfectly lovely man."

Plickner, who had daughters older than Janie, shook his head. At the same time he felt his enthusiasm grow. This young woman would face the music, and he accused her of staying with the captured men of her band. She didn't try to deny it.

He went among the bonfires, and when somebody accused him of neglecting to keep his eye on his prisoner, he shrugged his shoulders, saying:

"You couldn't make her not face the music if you dragged her away with lariats!"

"That's so! She had a hundred chances—" somebody exploded, and stopped in confusion. There was a laugh. Already every one knew that Janie had refused to run away.

Tired men rolled up in saddle-blankets in the barn or bunk-house to sleep. Horses fed more or less noisily down in the alfalfa. Out on the plains the great herd stirred in the moonshine, while the night-riders circled about holding them.

Valero had said the herd would be cut in two and half taken to the White Face cattle ranch, and half to the Marvelando ranch. The question of what to do with Janie Frete's little herd had not yet been settled. Janie would not try to think of the matter.

It was a long night, and for most of the men a restful one. Another great tradition had been established, and men who had thought the old days were gone forever from the West, were rejoicing to think that they were witness to this episode. partici-

pants in this bit of ancient history revived—not such ancient history at that!

In the morning, at the first streak of false dawn, some began to stir out, and fires were built—fires of cedars which had been dragged down the mountains by men on horseback, towing with lariats. Dawn found the men getting breakfasts, and making ready for the long drive to the Marvelando or White Face ranches on their way homeward. Till after sunrise, there was a bustling and bustling about, and then Sheriff Placard asked Undersberiff Plickner if Miss Frete didn't want to be moving on?

"I've just been looking for her," Plickner replied. "Po'r girl—she's about tired out, I reckon, with so much excitement. But I'll go an' get her."

He went to the bungalow kitchen and asked one of the breed women there if Miss Frete wouldn't come out, just a minute.

"Naw!" the woman shook her head, grinning. "Naw! She won't come out at all. Wha' for she come out? She been out three-fo' hours already!"

"Eh?" Plickner exclaimed.

"You bet!" the woman grinned. "'Bout t'ree bours ago she come out. Las' anybody see her, she go up the mountang!"

Plickner blinked. He returned to Placard and with a red face, said:

"Say, sheriff—she's done lit out!"

"That right?" Placard beamed. "Well—dog-gone it! I was gittin' pretty darn worrit that she wouldn't!"

CHAPTER XLI.

AN HOUR FOR TRENAL.

WHEN Janie had seen her three score or so guests well fed and taken care of, and when she and the Indian camp-women had cleared up the kitchen and put the things in their proper places, she looked in on the wounded men in the emergency hospital established in her bungalow. A surgeon was there on watch with Screaming Eagle, who was to this young graduate a most astonishing ex-

perience, taunting him with her own scientific attainments, while interjecting the casuals of Indian camp experience.

Janie, smiling, turned from them, and knowing that all was now well, according to her cares as hostess, she retreated from the camp, as it grew silent, and in her own room sat down to think.

Out of her adventure she had come to this! Across the years would fly the evil of her girlhood, and whatever sympathy she might have, now, as a weak and tormented woman, her past must rise to torment her. She was too tired to discover any hope for herself in the affair; but dismal as were the accumulating circumstances, she was jubilant when she thought that those wild and selfish desperadoes had out of sheer effort to help her, performed a feat that every man in the posse admired, merely as a bit of cattle-country work.

Every one had said it was marvelous—cutting up three herds of cattle, cutting out the Trenal brands, and rounding them up miles back in the tumbled lands of the Waning Glory Breaks, to run them off north to the shipping points.

"In another day they'd got away with them! Hard luck!" a cowboy had said succinctly.

It wasn't the loss of the chance at a fortune that broke Janie's spirit that night; her spirit wasn't broken, in fact. She was just sick at heart as she thought the men killed, the men wounded, and now, the men brought to chains—just when they had in all unselfishness, for sheer love of helping a tenderfoot girl establish herself on a ranch, they had performed those feats of skill, of daring, and finally of abandoned courage.

"Oh, this West!" she whispered. "What can one do with men like these?"

There they were, desperadoes and posse riders, professional men-hunters and ranchers, cowmen and townsmen breaking from the routine of habit of the crowd, to go rough riding across deserts and madly up and down mountains for sheer love of adventure, excitement, and performing impossible feats as a matter of course.

Among them all there was one Valero—poor benighted and helpless man, lost to

the whole spirit of what must have been a sheer game and play, but for his presence! Janie felt sorry for him, and laughed, with tears in her eyes, as she discovered in her mind the fact that, after all, he had been the first to propose that she escape from her predicament, under his wing.

Following him had come others, old men, youths, cowboys, and sheriffs' men—all kinds had proposed that she escape, with their help, or somehow! That was a revelation.

Janie tried to sleep, caught a cat-nap, awakened, and in a half-dream, half-memory, saw the figure of Irving Trenal standing over his chemical apparatus; but it was in the semi-cave up the mountain. She sat up and thought about it.

"I may not return for years—perhaps never," she mused, and a longing came to her heart to see that cave again, where a man had worked, between thoughts of love of her. She wished, when she slipped out of the room, through the still bungalow out into the night, that Trenal might somehow look down from wherever he dwelt now, and see that on his memory she was putting another hour of respect for sake of friendship.

"Oh, Trenal!" she whispered. "It was because we were such good friends that I was drawn out here—just to be where you were for a little while!"

She walked through the silent hivouae, called up her mountain-climbing pony, put on the bridle and rode away. She wasn't trying to be secretive about it; she didn't even think that this was irregular in a woman prisoner; in fact, she saw several men sit up and look at her—without a word, from their moonlighted shelters.

Afterward, however, she did think of it—what must they have thought, seeing her going away at that hour under those circumstances? Not one told the sheriff and Plickner what he had seen.

Janie circled around and up the mountainside, the pony carrying her in and out until they arrived at the little stall in the rocky face. She pulled down an armful of alfalfa, saw to it that the little spring-fed trough was clean, and then entered the cave-studio-laboratory.

Moonlight shone in, enough to light her thoughts. She disturbed nothing, changed nothing about; she just sat down at the table, and with her hands clasped, looked into the past.

She had so many things to remember—so many beautiful ideas—so many accomplishments to her credit—so pleasant a life to recollect! There had been other jeopardies, and other days when she had found nights without rest, because she was too tired.

Opening the window, and parting the loose trellis, she looked down upon the moonlighted ranch, and the cattle spread over the plain beyond. She could hear the night herders sing-singing, and see them on the outskirts of the hedged-down herd.

She heard a coyote howling. She heard owls around about in the cedars. She heard the faint, desert music—she heard voices—and more music—more voices—and then, peace in her soul at last, rested in heart enough to sleep, she put her hand upon her elbow and with a sigh left the dreamland of her life for the dreamland of slumbers.

The hot light from over the Sunrise Range awakened her at last. She started up surprised. She looked down on the great herd of cattle, which was already in motion, having been watered in the marsh, and well fed.

Streaming out from the ranch was the cavalcade, the ambulance carrying the wounded, the Indian schooner-wagon with four horses, the automobile truck—as though the ranch were being deserted.

"But they're leaving me!" she exclaimed. "That's the sheriff and Valero in his car! Why—ah!"

Janie looked at her wrist-watch. The sun was more than two hours high. The cavalcade, the sheriff and his posse were all going on—leaving her.

They didn't want her; they were glad she had gone; they—oh, those dear lawless boys! They were happy; she could hear their laughter and shouts as they romped along the rear and sides of the herd, merry-making.

"Oh, I'll overtake them," she smiled, hut with cheeks aglow, and eyes brightening,

she looked at the books, the papers, the laboratory of Irving Trenal.

Dreaming among those things, she had enjoyed many happy ranch days; and if Trenal was dead, and still remembered her, he must now understand the feeling that she had toward him—not love, certainly, but something that was akin to fellowship, understanding of his own enjoyment of that cery nest, and not afraid to ride forth to die terribly where, for a long time, perhaps forever, his bones must be scattered by the wild creatures.

Janie could understand a man who had died thus; and she knew that at the moment of his supreme agony, torn by a bullet, Trenal had nevertheless superbly held his soul in leash, while his own pistol-hand found its final service to do, killing the wretched bushwhacker by unflinching skill.

A thought entered Janie's mind; here might be hidden the solution of the mystery she felt, and all those men felt, regarding the Trenal ranch herd. It occurred to her that a careful, systematic search in those books and papers would disclose the truth, either confirming all of Valero's remarkable, but plausible claims—or leaving him unmasked for the scoundrel Janie knew him to be, regardless of any mere business deals he might have accomplished.

"No." Janie shook her head, with the odd fatality that sometimes guided her at a supreme moment. "No, I'll not disturb them any more."

She hacked out of the laboratory as from some sacred mountain-temple; slowly, noiselessly, with faith, she closed and locked the door. Then she hung the key on the lock.

"Perhaps somebody worthy will come to love you, Trenal," she whispered into the crack.

Her emotion, Janie's glorious emotion, filled her eyes as she mounted her pony to ride back down the mountain, through the hidden trail in the gullies and gulches and among the trees down to the foothills.

Then she rode around the bungalow and looked over the scene—it was all desert now; the Indian camp was broken, the

bungalow doors closed, the bars up to the alfalfa fence, and the bars down at the corral; she felt the chill of abandonment over the scene, and then, guiding her pony up the trail, set off at a brisk trot in pursuit of the cavalcade, which was now nearly twenty miles distant, in the dust of alkali and dancing in the mirage of the plain of Thirsty Creek Valley.

She let her mount into a gallop, not too swift, and at intervals she looked back, and her eyes sought the almost wholly indistinguishable fleck away up on the face of the Waning Glories, where she had that morning found a peace of soul denied her for many a day. She waved her hand, and she saw the whole mountain-face flicker and tremble, all alight with the bright sunshine.

Rather sternly, she looked ahead into her pathway; she could see many miles, clear way of a pair of ruts in the sage and alkali, where cars had worn them; hoof-prints of cattle and horsemen were flying beneath her, as she pounded along, her spirit measuring the glory of that day, as though it might be long before she would have such freedom again, she thought.

"Whatever mistakes I make, I'll face their consequences," she said in so many words. "Even my mistakes of ignorance and lack of experience. Just think! I came into all this without the least inkling of what I was falling into. Oh, but I'm not sorry. Those poor, dear boys; and then—then even they'd let me go, if I would—"

She laughed aloud with delight as she added:

"If I only would! How they'd like to be rid of me—if they could."

CHAPTER XLII.

VICTORY.

SO Janie rode on into the custody of Sheriff Placard and that mob of possemen. She rode up behind them, and of course she was discovered when she was within two miles or so, and the word was passed up and down. As she drew within recognizable distance, there was a yell, the involuntary whoop of men when they see

some one coming to face the music, regardless of consequences.

At the same time, when she rode up through the crowd to where Placard was leading the way slowly, in Valero's car, keeping company with the enjoyable crowd, she heard men swearing:

"What the blank-blank's she here for? Why didn't she stay gone?"

Placard told Valero to stop the car when he saw what was coming. He didn't look particularly pleased when he looked at her. But before he could think of anything to say she stopped beside the car.

"Well, I think, Sheriff Placard, that of all the escorts I ever heard of—the idea! going away and leaving me—*me!*"

"That's right. Jes' so," a whoop from near by chimed in.

Placard started to apologize, and then Janie laughed at him—and so did every one.

"If you don't make me," she added, to his complete discomfiture, "I sha'n't ride with you."

Accordingly she dropped back among the horsemen, and her guards were four deep around her all the rest of the way to the Marvelando ranch, where the ambulance had stopped, and where there was a livery car from Greengrass awaiting their arrival.

Harben Tarkley, an attorney from Chicago, had arrived.

"Sheriff Placard?" he greeted the commander of the cavalcade. "I don't know just what the circumstances are here, but I believe—so the newspapers and my information say—you have been seeking desperadoes, and have captured them. Now—ah—according to all accounts, my client—Miss Janie Frete—"

"You have a client—Miss Janie Frete?" Janie rode up to inquire.

"You—ah—you are Miss Frete?"

"If I'm your client, you should—"

"Certainly," he retorted promptly. "I should have known long since. It is quite through no fault of my own, I assure you. But Irve—Irvine—Trenal—we studied together, and naturally—"

Janie flushed a little.

"I do need you—an attorney. You see,

I'm under arrest now, and Mr. Placard here, the sheriff, will tell you, and Mr. Valero, that man, will corroborate him, that I am a cattle-rustler, and queen of the Waning Glory Breaks bandits. And, oh! I can't begin to tell you how bad I am."

"Eh?" Tarkley gasped. "Queen? Yes, yes, I understand that; but of the—ah—what bandits?"

"Waning Glory Range."

"I declare." He looked at her, and looking around at the assemblage: "And these are—ah—the bandits? Some queen, indeed!"

No need to tell that man where the trail was leading. Valero was crouching, staring with unblinking eyes; Sheriff Placard was flushed crimson with embarrassment; all hands were shouting with joy that they should be included in Janie Frete's entourage—even of bandits. Somehow, they just couldn't keep down the questionable hilarity of the occasion.

The herd of cattle, away out on the plain, was raising dust in the approach of sunset; they could not come as fast as the horsemen, of course. Tarkley saw and recognized them. He turned to Janie, who had dismounted:

"Yes, you are my client," he said. "Irving Trenal established my guardianship over your property, inherited from him, under the terms of his will; I stopped at Racklack and examined some documents there; what's all this stuff about a hundred thousand dollars mortgage on his ranch, anyhow? And where are your cattle—the Horned-A Brand?"

"My cattle?" Janie asked, while a breathless silence fell upon the spectators and audience.

"Trenal never wrote me; I didn't even know he had been killed till I read an account of this affair in a Chicago paper, Monday—Tuesday—I forget which. Of course I just caught the first train and came to find out what was up. That mortgage, filed at Racklack, is a forgery; a rank forgery! Trenal never used that signature; it's a clumsy copy of his letter signature

"His business signature was his name in full, his middle name—Clarence. I think, from what I heard at Racklack, you de-

ciderly do need an attorney to look after your affairs."

"What—wha—" Valero trembled as he half rose to his feet in the automobile, crying: "She—she made—she accepted the debt! It's legal! She accepted the debt! She made a payment on it—the—the mortgage!"

"Oh, you're it? She made a payment, eh?" Tarkley inquired softly.

"Yes, sir. She paid us—Mrs. Forelane and me. She admitted the debt."

"That's true?" Tarkley turned to Janie for confirmation.

"Yes," Janie replied.

"That's fine," Tarkley said heartily. "Fine! That completes the grand larceny. Grah him!"

There were no lack of hands to seize Valero as he jumped; two rawhide ropes, in fact, fell open him rather roughly and with opposing directions to their hauling taut. Valero was stretched out on the ground, as unceremoniously as a calf about to be branded. And lying there, perfectly helpless, he cried, choking and gasping, also like a calf, as was remarked.

"And my boys!" Janie turned to Tarkley, first of all. "My boys—the men I hired, who rounded up the Horned-A cattle?"

"Oh—their work for you? That's all right."

"Tarcass, Burke—they're dead!" Janie whispered. "But the others—they claim, you know, desperadoes."

"We'll see," Tarkley promised. "Who's that other—"

Valero disheveled and triced up, now quailed under his glance. Whatever had happened, Janie was absolved now—if not legally, at least she would be.

Valero was the cattle-thief, having forged to get a claim, and then enlisted the very government to steal the cattle from the real owner, whose outfit had sought to save to her what was rightfully hers. That, at least, the region could understand, and the men of the posse went around to shake hands with Snowflake and Chippy and the others.

"You boys had the right idea," they were told. "That scoundrel, Valero, had us

plumb locoed with his papers and legal fixings."

When the matters pertaining to Irving Trenal's estate had all been straightened out by his friend and executor, Harben Tarkley, there still remained the question of what to do with Tremaine Valero and Uintah Forelane.

Racklack had been rather glad to welcome these two at the county jail, where they were about the most distinguished prisoners ever lodged there. The prosecuting attorney left the matter in Janie's hands; Janie was without bitterness. She had suffered too much from bitterness in the hearts of other people—avarice and passion and other demonstrations—to regard them with a thirst for vengeance.

"But, Mr. Tarkley," she said, "I do want justice. It isn't because I am mean; there lie against my name stains; I'm willing to suffer for my own sins and indiscretions, but—"

The two men looked at her. She had difficulty in continuing her thought aloud. It had to be done, however:

"That woman obtained her divorce by accusing me and her husband. It was false. No man ever treated me better—nor her, either. But those papers, those affidavits—all lies, procured lies by hired witnesses! By her own perjury, too! Oh! I could tear her limb from limb for that shame she falsely inflicted upon me."

"You think—"

"That I shall prosecute this thing to the limit, if she does not before all the world confess to her infamous attack on my character. I don't care about the mortgage, nor the rest. But that—"

"I see," the attorneys said in unison.

They would have brought Uintah before them as a tribunal, but Janie said she wouldn't permit it.

"I don't want to see her; I never want to see her," Janie declared. "I never shall see her willingly, except when I have to testify in court to what I have suffered at her hands."

"But I'll be fair; I'll say, too, that I love this country, and its people, and I'll thank her, and Valero, for bringing me out here

the way they did, though it was to swindle me. Yet I—oh, you know I just love those men—Placard and the posse and all of them, and my own lovely desperadoes, too. Most of all, those bad hoys.”

For a minute her face was alight with that fine background.

“She’d eat a mile of rawhide, that woman,” said the prosecuting attorney, “just to keep out of jail. They’re broke, both of them. They owed about everybody, and there’s such a rush of foreclosing and injunctions on bank accounts and that kind of things that they’re stripped down to their black hearts.”

“We’ll see,” Tarkley said.

To tell the truth, Uintah Forelane hesitated at this last humiliation and atonement. Then abjectly she cleared the name of the woman she had twice wronged, and when the divorce case was thus reopened, she found herself no longer a divorcee, but married to Forelane.

Poverty-stricken now, and miserably heartsick, she realized what she had brought upon herself, her only resource—what she must become if—if there was no answer to the telegram she must send Arliss Forelane. Into her message, accordingly, she wrote the terror and humbleness of her confession and pleading:

Arliss, can you understand and forgive? I am down in the dirt. If you could—oh, Arliss!

That and more than that, hysterical in its fears, but sincere in her misery. Forelane sent one word that revealed the heart unswerving in its unwilling and even hopelessly indignant love:

Coming. ARLISS.

Janie, transported from determination to endure without complaint what might come to sheer freedom and enjoyment of a great region’s glories and humans, asked but little of her new-found friends.

“Sure!” they cried, “take ’em back on your ranch, and if you just keep ’em behaving themselves and rounding up your own cattle, nothing ’ll be said. We don’t care

about what they did away off yonder; it’s what they’re going to do that’d bother us.

“And say—Snowflake? He’s the best da—best man for cattle anywhere. If he hadn’t happened to kill his boss over in the Little Rockies in self-defense and got a lot of influential citizens down on him, he’d be the best cowboy ever; but that sent him long-riding. And if there’s anybody else—course, you’ve got to make ’em behave themselves.”

“Oh, they will,” she cried. “I know they will, and even Sugar.”

“Sugar? Who’s he?”

“I don’t know—just Sugar. If he didn’t get—”

“Was he the one that hull-frogged the long-horn steer and got away?”

“Was he, Snowflake?” she turned to the limping man, still on his feet, not having lost a day, despite almost killing bullet wounds.

“Yes.”

“He’d come back? He’d behave himself?” she asked.

“Would he?” Snowflake blinked his eyes. “Would he? The only time that hoy ever did git sentimental—one time, yo’ remember? He said he never did have a chance.”

“Oh, yes. I do remember. Send quick. Send him word, won’t you? Tell him he’s got a chance now.”

“You het!” Snowflake turned so quickly that his hurts made him see stars, and with a lift of his arm that almost made him faint, he called: “Hey, Chippy, come ’ere!”

Chippy, in Janie’s camping-car, started down Racklack’s Main Street, with the dust climbing faster behind the wheels. As his speed increased, the crowd that had come to the celebrated court-week, divining the situation, stood on their tiptoes, and as one man yelled:

“Go it! Bring ’im in!”

So Janie knew that the guide who had lost the Marvelando outfit away back at Pilot Peak, who was suspected of breaking up Sheriff Placard’s charge on the cattle herd, and killing Bleak Grisp, was also forgiven, and would become one of her new outfit—renewed, so to speak.

(The end.)

Anything to Oblige

by B

Samuel G. Camp

HIS name was Rudolph—Rudolph Van Rennselaer—and when the chief had handed me my cue, and I'd chalked up and got into Rudolph's game, it didn't take me long to find out that Rudolph was playing right up to form: He was in Dutch—all over.

Yes, sir, Rudolph surely had his troubles, and before long I had mine. And what I've got to say is all about those troubles of Rudolph's—and mine—and nothing else. When I've finished with those I'm through—the same as I am with Rudolph. That will be all.

Still, I know that if I ring off without going on record as to whether or not Rudolph made good, there 'll certainly be a howl from somewhere; and so, for the benefit of the hunch from Missouri, I may as well state right at the start off that he did. Rudolph made good—big!

More than that, he's still coming through strong and I don't know of any reason why he shouldn't keep the good work right up for some time to come—unless he gets to feeling like he simply had to oblige somebody. If Rudolph ever gets that way again I won't be responsible for the results, and what's more, somebody else can handle the situation—somebody besides me. And I take this opportunity to wish them all kinds of joy. As for me—enough is enough.

The chief sent me out to bring in Rudolph, dead or alive; and that ~~was~~ the way I brought him in: dead or alive—I didn't

know which. I don't mean Rudolph; I mean me. Physically, you understand, I don't ask any odds of anybody; but when I get worried I get nervous, and when I get nervous I generally get real good *and* nervous, and then—

But, anyhow, I went and did what the chief told me to: I brought in Rudolph. As soon as we hit town I took Rudolph by the hand and led him to the hotel where I knew the team was stopping. There were a few other little details, but we won't bother with 'em. You can fill 'em in for yourself later on.

The desk clerk said the chief was in his room. We went up and crashed in on the chief and I made him acquainted with Mr. Rudolph Van Rennselaer. The chief said he was glad to meet Rudolph; and, believe me, I was glad to *have* the chief meet him, because it meant that my responsibility ceased right there and then. Rudolph said he was glad to meet the chief, and so that made three of us.

Well, the chief punched the bag a while with Mr. Van Rennselaer, and then he asked him:

"How about it? Feel like working tomorrow?"

"Sure," says Rudolph, "if you want me to."

"Anything to oblige," says I.

Pretty soon after that the chief managed to get it past the bone that if Rudolph really felt like tearing himself away from us and

going to his room, or anything, there wouldn't be any hard feelings. And Rudolph obliged.

Soon as Rudolph had pulled his fade-out, the chief says to me:

"Well, Joe, I see you put it over."

"Yeh," says I, "I did that. And now, if it's all the same to you, John, I'd kinda like a little vacation or something. I feel all sorta worn out and nervous. I need a rest."

"Why, now that you speak of it," says the chief, "you do look kinda bad, Joe."

"You're a wonderful observer," says I.

"You've got a great pair of eyes. Most people wouldn't notice it."

Just before that, while the chief and Rudolph were gassing back and forth, I'd lined up in front of the mirror in the chief's room, and here's what I saw: There were big, black circles, an inch deep, underneath my eyes, and if I passed a man on the street that had the same kind of look in his eyes that I had, I'd tell the first cop I met that I'd seen a loose nut a little ways back and he'd better get busy before there was a murder or something; my cheeks were all sort of hollowed out and caved in, and I needed a shave; my hair was all mussed up every which ways, and when I tried to smooth it out my hand shimmed so that all I did was to muss it up worse. I had on a bow tie, which is generally worn horizontal by the best dressers, but mine was perpendicular.

"Yes, sir," I says to the chief, "you certainly are a great hand for noticing little things. No doubt if you went to the circus you'd notice the elephant before you ran into it and it threw you for a goal."

"What happened?" asked the chief.

"I'll tell you," says I, "but before we go into that, take a little tip from me: Don't take any stock in what that big Dutch cheese told you about his feeling all right to go in there and pitch to-morrow. Make him show you something first. He only said it to oblige you."

"How do you mean?" the chief asked me.

"I mean what I say," I told him. "He only said it to oblige you. If he'd had neuritis in both arms and a felon on every

finger he'd 'a' said the same thing. Anything to oblige! *Anything!*

"Listen, chief, I'm going to tell you something: If this bird, Rudolph Van Rennselaer, had one glass eye and one that was natural, and you came along and asked him for an eye, without specifying, he'd give you the good one! That's how obliging he is. The most obliging person on earth, bar none! I'll say he is—and I've got my reasons."

"Why, John, there ain't any lengths that that fellow wouldn't go to for a body! And so thoughtful of the feelings of others! You'd be surprised! Why—"

"If you know anything," the chief cut in on me, "let's hear it. Let's get together."

So then I told him.

In a way, it was a case of get results or get out. If it hadn't been, you can lay a bet that I wouldn't have gone and mixed into one of those affairs of the heart, as they call 'em, the way I did. Not that it was any affair of mine—and that goes both ways. As a general rule, if a couple of people want to have one of those affairs of the heart, I consider it's nobody's funeral but their own, and it usually works out that way—nine times out of ten I'm right.

But here was a situation where it was strictly up to me to come through or hunt a job. You understand, no doubt, that my job was ivory-hunting for the Pink Sox; and when I refer to the chief, I mean Mr. John McGowan, the team's celebrated manager. Well, just recently the chief had sent me out on a couple of bone-hunting expeditions, and I'd fallen down on the job—both of 'em.

I won't go into the details, but I'll say that, of course, it wasn't through any fault of mine. I'm just an ordinary human being and miracles are out of my line.

But that didn't make any difference. You know, there are times when people don't stop to make allowances—such as when there's some kind of a big jam on and it's a case of do something or go under—and this was one of those times. As a pennant possibility the Pink Sox were going into the discard—and going fast—just for want of a good reliable southpaw.

We simply had to dig up a regular big-league left-handed pitcher from somewhere or watch the World's Series from the grand stand. Now both of those trips that I'd taken were for the purpose of filling this hole in the Pink Sox line-up, and I'd come home without the bacon.

And when, shortly afterward, the chief got wind of this fellow Rudolph Van Rennselaer, he put it up to me in language that most any child could understand.

"I've got the lowdown on this man Van Rennselaer," says the chief, "and you don't have to worry about whether he's good or not. I'll take my chances on that. All *you've* got to do is *sign* him! That's all. Bring him in!

"And, Joe, if you don't—well, I'll do what I can for you, but you know how the owners feel about the way you booted the chance of grabbing those two other left-handers, and so, if I were you, I wouldn't rely a whole lot on my pulling you through if you don't deliver. I'm sorry, Joe, but that's the way it is. Do you follow me, Joe?"

"I'm right on top of you, chief," says I.

And I certainly was! It was straight up to me to talk or lose the wire. That was all there was to it.

"All right, Joe," says the chief. "Good-by, take care of yourself, and—good luck!"

"Thanks," says I. "Farewell, chief—it may be for days or it may be forever."

At a guess, there are about five thousand people in the world that have ever heard of Lymanville, Pennsylvania. They're the people that live there. Of course it's a long shot, but if it *does* happen that you're one of the others, I won't try to prove it to you—Lymanville. You'll have to take it for granted. That's the way I did. When I started for there I took it for granted; and when I started away from there I took it on the jump.

Anyway, I reached Lymanville along late in the afternoon. All the dope I had on this boy-wonder, Rudolph Van Rennselaer, was that he was pitching for Lymanville in the Three-B League—Bones, Boots, and Brawls, I guess. Of course, in the end I'd have to do business with the manager of the Lymanville outfit, but I thought first

I'd have a little heart-to-heart talk with Rudolph. After that, we'd see—and we did.

Another thing: I'd learned from experience that in the tusk-hunting business it doesn't pay to advertise. So when I registered at the hotel I sort of handed out the idea that I was selling plows, or flivvers, or some other kind of agricultural implement; and then, without tipping off my hand, I managed to find out where I'd probably find Rudolph.

Rudolph, I learned, was living at a boarding-house run by a Mrs. Platt. When I rang the door-bell Mrs. Platt, I guessed it was, came to the door; and when I asked for Mr. Van Rennselaer she said she thought he was out in the back yard in the hammock.

Maybe I didn't say that we were having a regular hot spell, and somehow I don't seem to stand those hot spells as well as I used to. I guess that was one of the reasons why—

But, anyhow, Mrs. Platt had the right idea. I found Rudolph in the back yard, every inch of him depending on the hammock for support, and dead to the world. I always envy these fellows, the sort that seemingly haven't got a thing in the world to worry 'em, and that can sit down or lie down most anywhere and pass away in a second it would seem like. As for me, being a married man and all, and what with one thing and another to worry me, I'm lucky to get six hours' sleep a night, to say nothing of sleeping between sleeps.

Well, when I shook Rudolph out of it he showed right away that the old brain was right in there working just as smooth and easy as oil—and quick, too. Quick as a flash he said that he guessed he must have been asleep.

I told him that I'd certainly hate to get into a guessing contest with him; and then I introduced myself. I told him by name and said I was scouting for the Pink Sox.

"Joe Lathrop!" says he. "The old White Sox backstop! I—I remember hearing about you."

"Thanks, Rudolph," says I. "When you've been off the billboards a while every little bit helps. But getting down to busi-

ness, you haven't got a fountain pen handy, have you?"

"What for?" he asked.

"You're going to sign out with the Pink Sox," says I just as if I meant it, which I did, "and I forgot and left mine home."

"The Pink Sox!" says Rudolph.

"You heard me," says I.

"Me pitch for the Pink Sox?" he says, as if he couldn't believe his ears.

"Well," says I, "that's the intention, anyway. Of course—"

"Oh, gee!" he wailed. "Can you beat it? Ain't that just my luck?"

"What's the matter now?" I fired at him, beginning to feel a sort of slipping feeling.

"I can't!" he groaned, throwing up his hands like as if to say "All is lost!" or something like that. "I'm all sewed up!"

I looked at him. At first glance you'd put Rudolph down for nothing but an overgrown boy—a big kid; and you'd be right, and wrong. He was big, all right enough; but the only reason he was a kid was because he'd *always* be one. No doubt you get the idea. Rudolph was one of the sort that never grow up; you know the kind. Well, anyhow, when I took that good look at Rudolph I placed him at twenty-five, and missed by a year. He was twenty-six, I found out later. But the rest of my guesses were better.

I sized him up as being one of these good-natured, easy-going sort of fellows, and, on top of that, the sort of bird that doesn't know his own mind once in a coon's age and sort of irresponsible to boot; that's it, sort of irresponsible. And they were all dead-center shots. Events proved that I surely had Rudolph right.

"What do you mean, all sewed up?" I fired at him. "Do you mean you've signed up with some other club in the big show?"

"No," says he—and I felt better. "But—I—I—" he started again, and stopped. And I'd 'a' taken my oath he was blushing!

"Come through with it you big goof!" I barked. "What's ailing you?"

"I—I'm gonna be married," says he, as coy as a sixteen-year-old girl.

I laughed.

"Well, don't let that worry you, Rudolph," says I. "You know there's lots

of married men in the big leagues—honest there is! Fact is, the married men make the best players; or, as you might say, it's the women they're married to that make the best players—if you were looking for the explanation.

"A married man has some sense of responsibility. You bet he has! Anyway, marriage ain't any bar to service in the big show. Nobody 'll think a bit the less of you for it. It's done right along. When are you due to step off?"

"Day after to-morrow," says he.

"Well," says I, "I was hoping we could get away to-morrow, but—that's all right. We'll take the bride right along with us, and—"

"Not a chance," he mourned. "No more chance than a rabbit! Prunella ain't got any use for baseball, and she said I'd have to give it up, and so I've got to.

"Besides—you know I've been pulling down pretty good money pitching for Lymanville—we've got our wedding-trip all planned out, going to Niagara Falls and then up into Canada and around, and Prunella's got her mind set on it, and—it wouldn't be right. I couldn't think of disappointing her. So, you see—"

"Say," says I, "I thought you were pitching baseball for Lymanville. Is that the custom in the Three-B League—to allow a player a month or so off for a honeymoon right in the middle of the season?"

"There ain't any Three-B League," Rudolph informed me. "She blew up last week, and the boss paid us off and gave us our releases, and—"

"Then you're a free agent?" I says.

"Well," says he, "I would be if it wasn't for Prunella."

"I guess you've said it," said I. "Strikes me that Prunella is the center of this particular disturbance, as you might say. But, Rudolph, I'm going to tell you something: Maybe you've got an idea that you ain't going to sign out with the Pink Sox. If you have, you're wrong; get that idea right out of your head. You are!

"There's several reasons why you're going to hire out to the Pink Sox, and the best one is because I'm a married man and I can't afford to lose my job! Do you get

me, Rudolph? Something tells me that, Prunella or no Prunella, you're going to sign on the dotted line and right away afterward you're going on a journey with a short, dark, good-looking man, which is me! Now you just listen!"

And with that I tore into him. I had a lot of good arguments and I fed 'em to him one by one straight from the shoulder. Yes, sir, I surely talked turkey to Rudolph. Here was his chance in the big show, I told him—his chance to reach out and grab fame, coin, everything, and he was throwing it away just to suit the mere whim of—of Prunella!

Where was his sand? I asked him. All he had to do was show a little determination and no doubt Prunella would soon come around to a more sensible view of things. For that matter—but never mind. I'll simply say this: When I finished I was right where I started.

"I know," says Rudolph. "It's all so; and—and I'd give a leg just to pitch one game for the Pink Sox! But there ain't any use. Prunella's got everything all planned out, and—I couldn't think of disappointing her."

"Anything to oblige, eh?" says I.

"I guess that's it," says he.

And if you ever saw a man look helpless and hopeless, it was Rudolph.

"Rudolph," I asked him, "are you keeping something from me?"

"Why, no," says he, as innocent as a lamb. "What would I be keeping from you?"

"Search me," says I. And—well, I thought a minute, and then I said: "Well, Rudolph, I guess that 'll be all for now. But don't think for one minute that I ain't coming back. I am. I'll see you again sometime to-morrow. And, listen. Keep all this under your hat. Don't tell anybody who I am or why I'm here. Is that clear?"

"All right," says Rudolph.

"By the way," says I. "What's her last name?"

"Fitch," says he.

"Thanks," I says, and left him.

As I turned the corner of the house I happened to look back. And unless I was all wrong, Rudolph was asleep again.

Well, I certainly felt tired and pretty well discouraged, too, to say the least. I went hack to the hotel, lay down on my bed for a little rest, then went through the motions of eating a little something—and all this while I was thinking, and the more I thought the less it got me.

Any way I looked at it, seemed to me I was squarely up against it. No light anywhere. It was a tough old world and that's all there was to it. Finally I got desperate and sent off a wire to the chief:

For the love of Mike what will I do? This big turnip, Van Rennselaer, is all dated up to get married day after to-morrow, and then they're going to escape to Canada for a month, and the girl says he's got to lay off baseball, anyway, and wild horses can't do a thing with him, and so what chance have I got? What do you think I am? A miracle man? Answer at once and let we know whether this lets me out.

I sent that off to the chief and then I tried to put the whole thing out of my mind until to-morrow. And it was just as easy as forgetting an ulcerated tooth or for the rent-collector to forget to come around.

Next morning I stuck around the hotel till the answer came from the chief. It said:

Join team to-morrow in Philadelphia. Bring Van Rennselaer with you.

The way I acted after I read that, I guess people must have thought I was crazy. Maybe I was. Anyway, right away afterward I sent off another wire to the chief. This one said:

Have man ready to start for Lymanville with cash bail when you hear from me.

Of course, I didn't know just exactly what I was going to do, but, judging from the things that I felt *capable* of doing, seemed to me like it might be a good scheme to be prepared for the worst.

Then I asked the desk clerk if he'd be kind enough to tell me where the residence of Mr. Fitch might be, and he said he'd do better than that and tell me just exactly where it *was*, and he did it. And so then I started for Mr. Fitch's place.

The idea had hit me during the night: I'd drop in on Rudolph's bride-to-be and

see if I couldn't get her to listen to reason, myself. If Rudolph made good in the big league it would mean a lot of coin, and—well, anyway, I'd try it. No harm trying, anyhow. And who knows? Maybe—

But, anyway, a big, strapping, fierce-looking bird came to the door, and I guessed it was Mr. Fitch—anyway, he certainly looked and acted as if he was the works round about there. He looked like he'd be a pretty tough customer to buck up against, too. In fact, if it was all the same to Mr. Fitch, he and I would have very little to do with each other.

"Mr. Fitch?" I asked him.

He admitted it and wanted to know what he could do for me.

"Is Miss Fitch at home?" I asked him.

"Which one?" says he.

Seemingly there was more than one Miss Fitch—and to save my life, just then I couldn't seem to remember the name of Rudolph's Miss Fitch. All I could remember was that it began with some kind of fruit.

"Funny," says I, "but I can't seem to recollect. What daughters have you?"

"Well," says he, "there's Geraldine, and Maude, and Alice, and Louise, and May, and—did I mention Maude?"

"Yeh," says I. "You mentioned her."

"And Florence," he went on, "and Prunella, and—"

"Never mind the rest," I says. "Prunella wins. Could I be allowed to see Miss Prunella?"

"What's your business?" he inquired.

Now I wasn't sure that I had any business with Prunella, and I was getting less certain of it all the time—anyway, I wanted to get a look at Prunella first, and then I'd act accordingly—and, besides, I had a notion that if I came right out with it and stated my real business with Prunella, Mr. Fitch might think I was presuming on such slight acquaintance, or something, and maybe he wouldn't like it, and I didn't want to do anything that Mr. Fitch wouldn't like, and so:

"Why," says I, "you see, it's like this. I'm—well—you see, I'm on the road for a— for a big New York furniture house. Household furnishings and—household furnishings—and—well—stuff like that—see?

I ain't got any samples with me because—well, beds and Davenport and those sort of things are kinda unhandy to carry around.

"Understand me? But I happened to hear that Miss Prunella was going to be married, and no doubt they're going to set up housekeeping, and so I thought I'd call on her and see if they've made arrangements about buying their furniture, and if they haven't—well, I've certainly got a mighty attractive proposition and I'd like to put it up to her."

I've always felt pretty proud of that. It was good.

"Come in," says Mr. Fitch. I made good. "Step into the parlor," says he, and pointed the way. I stepped. Then he left me and I heard him yelling for Prunella.

I didn't have to wait long. Prunella came. And as she crossed the threshold a thought crossed my mind: I'd just as soon take one on the chin from a heavyweight champ as I would from Miss Prunella Fitch. You'd never know the difference!

She shaded six feet by an inch, had large, capable hands and feet, a face like a pirate chief, and determination stuck out of her in more places than quills stick out of a porcupine. She was a regular Woolworth among women, Prunella was, and like all other imposing modern edifices, of concrete-and-steel construction—all the way.

I rose to salute—and never felt more like it in my life.

"Miss Fitch?" says I.

"Certainly!" she snapped.

"To be sure," says I. "Well, Miss Fitch, on second thought, I won't detain you. I came here to talk furniture, but I find that I've left my catalogues at the hotel, and I can't do business without 'em, and so—maybe I can find time to call again, but I doubt it. In fact, I'm sure of it!"

"This way out," says she.

I went away from there.

And I went straight to Rudolph. This time I found him in his room at Mrs. Platt's.

"Rudolph," I greeted him, "I've got the goods on you."

"How do you mean?" he asked.

"I'm wise to the whole situation," I told him. "I've called on the bride, and I know

what's happened. Seeing is believing. You don't want to marry this Fitch dame. You know you don't.

"You've been buffaloeed into this marriage and you haven't got gumption enough to try and save yourself—though I don't know as I blame you, considering what you're up against, having seen father and Prunella, and no doubt the rest of the family are to be reckoned with, too. Ain't it the truth?"

"Well, yes," he admitted. "I guess that's the straight of it."

"I thought so," says I. "All right. Come on! Let's go!"

"Where?" asked Rudolph.

"Away from Lymanville!" says I. "On to the big league! Snap out of it! Show your sand, you big jelly-fish! Let's beat it!"

Just for an instant it seemed like I had him going; but—no!

He shook his head. "It's no use," he says. "I couldn't think of disappointing Prunella. I wouldn't want to do anything to disoblige her like that. She's got her mind set on—"

For two cents I would have killed him and gone to the chair with a smile!

"All right, helpless," I ground out at him, "we'll see whether you will or not! What time's the wedding to-morrow?"

He told me ten o'clock.

"Ten," I says. "Very well. Now get this: Some time between now and ten o'clock to-morrow you're going to leave this village. You're going far away and you're never coming back. Compared to you a rabbit is a fighting fool and there's more nerve in half an inch of yellow dog than you've got in your whole blamed frame!

"But that don't make any difference. I'm here to save you—and my job—and I'm going to do it! I'm going to set something off under you—I don't know what, but something—and you're going to start running and keep right *on* at it till this burg and Prunella and all ain't anything but just a memory!

"Do you get me, Rudolph? You're leaving here before ten to-morrow! That's just as sure as God made little apples—if I have to use chloroform!"

Well, it was just like I said it was. I didn't have the ghost of an idea of what I was going to do; but I was going to do something! I had to. I went back to the hotel, locked myself in my room, and went to it. I never came up for air until nine o'clock that night. Then I had a bite to eat, went for a little walk—Lymanville by moonlight—and then went at it again!

It was during this time, and afterward, that I picked up those inch-deep chocolate circles under my eyes, and all the rest of it. But never mind all that. I won't go into the thousand-and-one hare-brained schemes that I dug up from somewhere, fooled with a while, and then chucked into the discard. I'll simply say this: At half past eight the next morning—one hour and a half to go!—when it seemed like I could feel the old brain rattling round inside my dome like a dried pea in a pod—all of a sudden it came!

Less than half an hour later a large, high-powered motor-car stopped in front of Mrs. Platt's boarding-house in Lymanville, Pennsylvania. I stepped out of it, told the driver to keep the engine running, and shortly afterward I crashed in on Rudolph.

Rudolph's bridal clothes were draped all over the place and he was just starting in to get all harnessed up for the nuptials.

Now, mind you, I knew my Rudolph like a little book. He'd always choose the easiest way! And that was what I was depending on.

"Rudolph," says I, "oblige me by putting your coat back on again. You might bring your hat, too. You're going to need it. But, first, I want you to come downstairs with me. I'm going to do a little telephoning, and I want you to listen in."

Well, of course, Rudolph didn't get the idea, but he obliged—even to the hat.

I'd noticed a phone in the down-stairs hall, and, with Rudolph standing by, I got central and gave the number. It seemed to excite Rudolph, the number did.

"That's Mr. Fitch's number!" says he.

"Right-o!" says I. "One mind in a thousand, boy! Once you learn a thing, you're like the elephant: it never forgets—Mr. Fitch? Listen, Mr. Fitch. This is a friend. I said a friend! Friend! Never

mind that. You understand I don't want to get mixed up in this thing, but—I've got something to tell you. Something you ought to know.

"It's about this fellow Rudolph Van Rennselaer, the one that's going to marry your daughter. Yeh, Rudolph! Mr. Fitch, I think you'd be interested to know that this fellow is already married! That's what I said! Got one wife already! She lives in—

"What? You're going to see about that? Well, I would, Mr. Fitch—I certainly would!"

And with that I hung up.

Now, of course I'd figured on this little move of mine having considerable effect on Rudolph's state of health, but—it turned out to be a knockout! The only thing that held him up was the wall.

"Now, you human marshmallow," says I, "you know father! And you know Prunella! And if I ain't mistaken they're the kind of people that get action first and ask questions afterward—especially father! Will you wait here to be murdered, or—"

"Let's go!" gasped Rudolph—and started!

I chased after him.

And then, as Rudolph and I went plunging down the front steps of Mrs. Platt's hoarding-house, a little dame that looked all worried up and excited came running up the walk. And when she saw Rudolph:

"Rudolph!" She gave one of those glad cries—and fell on him!

"It—it isn't too late?" she gasped.

"No, madam," I says. "It ain't too late—yet. But it will be in about four minutes! And if you'll excuse me, what's the idea? Who—"

"I'm his wife!" says she—just like that! And one look at Rudolph convinced me.

"Into the car, Brigham Young!" I yelled at him. "And you, too, Mrs. Young! We'll thresh this out while we're on our way! Just now we've got to be going!"

And so that's the story that I told the chief.

"And do you mean to say, Joe, that you had no idea that this fellow was married?" asked the chief.

"No more idea than a rabbit!" I told him.

And, of course, as you know, I hadn't. I had Rudolph's number and I knew that, no matter how innocent he might be, he'd rather run than face father. So would I! I'd figured that that little stunt of mine would jar Rudolph into action—and it did!

As for the real state of affairs, no doubt it was like this: After Miss Prunella Fitch had got Rudolph deep enough into her toils, as they call 'em, Rudolph didn't have the nerve to tell the truth, and he couldn't make up his mind to break away. And there he was—till I came and saved him.

It was a good deal as Mrs. Rudolph Van Rennselaer told me herself. Seems a traveling man who was a friend of hers had got wind of where Rudolph was, and had heard about this proposed second marriage of Rudolph's, and—well, she wasn't too late, as it turned out. She and Rudolph had had one of those family affairs, and—

"But," she told me, "after Rudolph had gone away I realized that that creature had simply thrown herself at him, and all he'd done was to try and be decent to her, because—well, you know that's the way Rudolph is: He's so obliging and—and everything. And of course that's the way he got into this last trouble. He's so obliging."

"Obliging is right," says I.

U U U

THE PEARLS OF LIFE

BY CLINTON SCOLLARD

PEARLS of the morning—these are lucent dews;
 Pearls of the twilight—these are day's last hues;
 Pearls of sweet music—these are notes of birds;
 Pearls of affection—these are love's own words!



The Light Machine

by Ray Cummings

TUBBY took his feet off the fender of the little stove in the back room of O'Connor's Grocery and glared at his two friends aggressively.

"That ain't so," he declared. "That ain't so, nohow."

"Well *he* said," the first man repeated, "as how that's just the way it is—that light travels one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles in a second."

"Taint so," said Tubby. "That's too fast for anything to go."

"That's what he said," the first man reiterated imperturbably. "One hundred and eighty-six thousand miles in a second—that's what he said."

"Well 'taint so," Tubby repeated; he rose to his feet suddenly. "You can see light, can't you?" he demanded.

"Course I can see light. I ain't blind."

"Can you see a automobile when it's going past a hundred miles a hour?" Tubby pointed a fat little forefinger directly into the first man's face.

"Why, why, yes," said the first man, surprised into confusion.

"And can you see the *spokes* of a automobile wheel when it's going past a hundred miles a hour?"

The first man thought a moment. "Why, why, no," he said finally.

Tubby lowered his forefinger. "Then that proves it ain't so," he declared triumphantly. "Nor you couldn't see a bullet if I shot it past your nose, could you?"

"You couldn't, Jake," the second man put in.

"No, you couldn't," said Tubby. "Nor you couldn't see light if it went that fast neither. Ain't I right? Could you?"

"He's right, Jake," said the second man. Tubby sat down.

"Well, *he* said," the first man resumed unabashed—"he said as how light travels one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles in a second. And furthermore, and in addition, he said as how some of the stars were so far away that it takes the light hundreds and hundreds of years just getting here from them."

"It was all in the movie," said the second man wearily. "'The Wonders of Light'—I remember it."

"Well, *I* don't believe it," said Tubby. "Because I know it ain't so—not none of it."

He stood up again; then with sudden thought he waddled across the room to the open window.

"Come here," he said, commandingly; the two other men joined him.

"Ain't them stars up there?" he asked. He pointed through the open casement to a brilliant, cloudless summer evening sky.

"Yes—them's stars all right," the first man agreed. "If that's what you mean."

"That *ain't* what I mean," said Tubby. "I said, 'Ain't them stars up there?' Are they up there, or ain't they? That's what I want to know."

"They're up there all right, Jake," said the second man.

"If you can see them, mustn't they be there?" Tubby persisted.

"Yes," said the first man. "When you can see them they must be there."

"Then," said Tubby—he paused impressively—"then the light of them must be here and there at the same time. Am I right?"

"He's right, Jake," said the second man.

"'Cause if it took the light a hundred years to get here we couldn't see them for a hundred years yet. Am I right?"

The first man went back to the stove. Tubby and the second man joined him after a moment.

"I ain't telling you what *I* think," the first man remarked. "I'm telling you, what *he* said—"

"It ain't got no sense," said Tubby.

"*I'm* going to the movies," said the second man abruptly. "Come on."

"Not me," said Tubby. "I ate too much. I'm going to sleep."

"It's 'The Burning of Rome,'" said the first man. "Nero playing the piano while the city burns. Come on. It's good—I've seen the pictures."

And reluctantly Tubby allowed himself to be led away.

The little Moving Picture Theater was hot and stuffy; Tubby found an aisle seat with his friends, near the back. For a quarter of an hour or more he sat blinking at the flickering screen. The Topical Review interested him not at all; he yawned and squeezed his fat little body lower into the hard narrow seat.

Then the picture changed. It was not "The Burning of Rome" yet, but a short picture, evidently science. Tubby frowned at it in silence.

The first man nudged him. "Wake up," he said. "Here's a astronomical picture about the stars. Wake up. It'll be good. 'The Burning of Rome's' next."

"I ain't asleep," Tubby whispered back. "I'm thinking."

The wonders of celestial space were unfolding before Tubby's eyes. But he hardly saw them. He was thinking of what Jake had said—those tremendous

figures Jake had reeled off to him. What was it he had said? One hundred and eighty-six thousand miles in a second. There were sixty seconds in a minute, and sixty minutes in an hour! That would be—

"Taint so," he muttered to himself doggedly.

He felt a light touch on his arm and looked up to see a little man standing beside him in the aisle. In the dim light Tubby could not see the little man very well; but he *could* see that he did not know him.

The little man bent down toward Tubby's ear.

"I want to talk to you," he whispered.

"What about?" said Tubby.

The little man shook his head. "I can't talk in here. Come outside for a moment."

Tubby hesitated.

"It's very important," the little man added. "You must come—just for a moment. I've wanted to see you for a very long time."

Tubby clambered to his feet; his two friends, absorbed in the picture before them, did not notice him leave. In silence he followed the stranger back up the aisle to the lighted theater lobby.

"I've wanted to see you for a long time," the little man repeated. Tubby could see now he was a very little man, with a thin, frail body and a very big head set upon a long spindly neck. His hair was snow-white and long about his ears. His yellow face was seamed with lines, but most of it was hidden by flowing side-whiskers and by a pair of huge iron-rimmed spectacles. He wore a long black frock coat that hung from his thin shoulders like a shroud.

"I'm a professor," said the stranger. He held out a shriveled, taloned hand. "A Professor of Light," he added impressively.

"Oh," said Tubby.

"My name is Obadiah Oats."

Tubby shook hands. "Mine's Tubby," he said. "Pleased to meet you."

The professor put on his high hat, which made him nearly as tall as Tubby.

"I want to consult you on a matter of very great importance to both of us," he said slowly.

Tubby waited.

"About light," the professor added. He linked his arm in Tubby's confidentially. "I need your help. They tell me you're the smartest man in town. I wanted to find you. With a brain like yours and mine—"

"Yes," said Tubby breathlessly, when the professor paused.

"My laboratory's right across the street," said the little man. "I'll show you."

Tubby followed the professor out of the theater, through a little doorway across the street and up several flights of rickety stairs into a room on the top floor of the house.

"This is where I work," said the professor. "Sit down."

It was a large room with endless row of bottles upon tiers of shelves lining its walls. Several long tables stood about, and Tubby saw they were crowded with curious apparatus—little tubes in racks, microscopes, triangular pieces of glass with candles behind them, and several contrivances of wheels and weights that looked like clock works. In the exact center of the room was one larger apparatus of a sort Tubby had never seen before; it seemed very complicated and he stared at it with awe. He could make nothing out of it except that part of it was a huge telescope, extending up through the skylight of the room. He glanced upward, and there, through a narrow, open slit in the glass, he could see the stars shining.

"That's a Light Machine," said the professor, following his glance. "There's only one in the world, and there it is."

"Yes," said Tubby.

"It's the most wonderful machine that was ever built," the professor went on softly. "I built it; and now *you* are going to help me make money out of it."

"Yes," said Tubby. "How?"

"That's what *you* are going to tell *me*. Don't you see? I am a man of science—you are a business man. That's the difference between us."

"Yes," said Tubby.

"First I'll have to explain. You have a head for figures, of course?"

"No—yes," said Tubby. "Of course."

"But you don't know much about light?"

"Yes—no," said Tubby.

"Naturally. How could you. Nobody does—but me. And I know all about it—all." He emphasized the last word impressively. "And now I'm going to tell it to you."

"Thank you very much," said Tubby, and waited.

"All my life," began the professor—he spoke softly; his eyes, fixed on Tubby seemed staring at dim, distant spaces—"all my life—since I was a little boy—I have been studying the properties of light. It is a very wonderful thing—you realize that, do you not—the most wonderful thing in the whole of science?"

"Oh, yes," said Tubby.

The professor drew in a deep breath, like a long sigh reversed. "Light," he began again, "is a vibratory wave in the Ether. You know what the Ether is?"

"No," said Tubby.

"It is like air. But you cannot breathe it. It exists everywhere—even in the outermost realms of Space. Now do you understand?"

"Yes," said Tubby.

"Light is vibration of the Ether," the professor went on in his droning voice. "Its vibrations travel through the Ether at the rate of one hundred and eighty-six thousand three hundred and twenty-four miles a second."

"I know *that*," said Tubby.

"You are learned man," the professor said admiringly. "You have a wonderful mind. I knew you had—they said so."

"Yes," said Tubby. "Go on."

The professor jerked his little body upright in his chair suddenly, so suddenly that Tubby started violently with fright.

"How long is a second?" the professor asked aggressively.

"Why—tick-tick. That's it," said Tubby.

The professor relaxed in his chair. "You are a clever man. You will have your little joke.

"But we must be serious. I will tell you how long a second is. It is exactly one-thirty-one millionth, five hundred and

fifty-eight thousandth, one hundred and forty-ninth part of a year."

"Oh," said Tubby.

"Do you know what a year is?"

"Three hundred and sixty-five days," said Tubby promptly.

The professor smiled again. "A year is the time it takes the Earth to revolve once around the Sun. Thus you see there are 31,558,149 seconds in a year—which is a little more than $365\frac{1}{4}$ days."

"Yes," said Tubby. "I see."

"Now to find out how far light travels in a year we simply take its speed per second and multiply it by sixty. That is its speed per minute. Multiply that by sixty gives it speed per hour and so on up to a day or a year. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Tubby. "How—how far does it go in a year?"

The professor raised his hand.

"That is a very simple problem—only mental arithmetic for me. Wait. Let us go further."

"Yes," said Tubby. "Go on."

"The distance Light travels in one year is called a Light-year. Now, some of the stars are so far away that it takes light many centuries to come from them, traveling at that speed I have just mentioned. Thus we measure their distance from us as so many hundred Light-years. Do you see?"

"Yes," said Tubby. "How—how many miles away from us is the farthest star—the very farthest?"

The professor leaped to his feet. "Ah, I was expecting you to ask that." His face was beaming. "You are a clever man. But I'm ready for you. I figured it all out this afternoon and wrote it down. I'll show you."

He led Tubby to a corner of the room. Tubby saw a perfectly enormous roll of narrow paper tape, like the tape that comes from a stock ticker, or is rolled up around baby ribbon. Only this roll was bigger than he was. It was hung vertically on a spindle, which had a handle to rotate it so that the tape could be unwound and wound again easily. A few feet away there was a similar spindle, but empty.

"I wrote it down for you," the professor repeated—"the distance in miles of the furthest star from the Earth. I wrote it down—on this."

He took the loose end of the tape and reeling off a few feet hooked the end onto the empty spindle.

"Watch closely," he said. "I'm going to show you the number."

He started to wind up the tape on the empty spindle. Tubby stood close beside the strip of tape stretching the space between the two spindles; it passed directly under his face.

"Watch closely," said the professor again. "There comes the first of it."

Tubby saw a row of little digits start on the tape. The first three were 154. Then after the comma began a string of ciphers; after each three ciphers was another comma.

The moving tape carried this endless row of little ciphers swiftly under Tubby's nose. He stared at them fascinated. Faster and faster they flew by as the roll of tape wound up on the spindle the professor was turning. For half an hour he turned briskly. Then the row of ciphers stopped just as the other end of the tape fluttered off the unwinding spindle.

The professor leaned against the wall, breathing hard.

"That—was—the—number," he gasped.

Tubby blinked. "What—what number was it?" he asked finally.

The professor recovered his breath and sat down again in his chair wearily.

"It was one hundred and fifty-four zillions," he answered. "The largest number that has ever been written down. I wrote it down this afternoon."

"Yes," said Tubby. "It was a big number."

The professor pulled at his side-whiskers thoughtfully. "We must get on," he said. "Now you understand how far the stars are away. And how fast light travels. That brings us to my Light Machine."

Tubby sat up with interest. "To the Light Machine. Yes, go on."

"As you can see," the professor continued. "I know all about Light—I am its master. No one in the world knows as much about Light as I do. And only one

man in the world thinks he does." The professor's eyes gleamed vindictively. "Ah, how I hate him; that man!"

"Who?" Tubby asked with interest. "What is his name?"

"His name is Einstein," answered the professor. "I hate him—I loathe him—I despise him."

"Oh," said Tubby. "I'm sorry."

"But he cannot harm *me*. I'm too clever for him. And *you* will help me. We still have time—he cannot prove anything yet."

"No—yes," said Tubby.

The professor stood up. "Let us get on with my invention. *Then* you'll see what a wonderful man I am. I will be brief."

Tubby joined him beside the telescope in the center of the room.

"What you must understand first," said the professor, "is *my* theory of Light."

Tubby waited.

"No light is ever destroyed," the professor continued. "It passes beyond our vision, that is all. But it always exists somewhere, in the outer realms of Space."

"That's where it goes when it goes out," Tubby put in. "Ain't I right?"

"Yes," said the professor. "That's where it goes—out into the realms of Space."

"Now what you must understand is that light can be reflected, refracted, polarized, but never destroyed. He pointed to his instruments on one of the tables. "I can do all those things to it—and a thousand more—but I cannot destroy it."

"Right," said Tubby. "But if you put it out you can't never get it back, can you now?"

The professor beamed on him genially. "Your brain works too keenly," he said. "You anticipate me. No, I cannot get it back. But it comes back. That's just the point—it comes back. That's what nobody in the world knows except me—me and you."

"The sun," he went on, "gives us most of our light—it gets here to the earth from the sun in a few minutes. The moon gives us reflected sunlight. It is the same light, only it comes to us from the sun by way of the moon. It takes a little longer that way."

"How much?" Tubby asked.

"Not much—just a few seconds—the moon is not far away. Now all this light that strikes the earth is reflected back into space. In a hundred years—less or more according to the distance—it strikes the different stars. There it mingles with other light. And then, mark me well, and then"—the professor paused impressively—"then in another hundred years it comes back to us again—the same light—mixed with other light of course—but some of the same light we had two hundred years before. Do you understand?"

"No—yes," said Tubby.

"That," said the professor, "*is the Oats Theory of the Rationality of Light*. I call it that because it is rational—it is in accordance with all known physical laws."

"Some others I could name"—the professor's voice shook with suppressed passion; his eyes gleamed again wickedly—"some others are not so scrupulous. *Their* theories do *not* coincide with recognized physical laws—they transgress them all. Mere astronomical outcasts—mathematical lepers—scientific pariahs—"

"Oh—you mean that other guy?" said Tubby.

The professor calmed himself with an effort. He pulled a huge black silk handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his dripping forehead.

"We won't talk of him," he said after a moment.

"No, we better leave him out of it," Tubby agreed. "Ain't I right?"

The professor nodded. "Now we come to *my* great discovery. I'll tell you about that now."

"When this sunlight is reflected from the moon to us, it brings with it an image of the moon, which was not in the light when it left the sun. Do you understand?"

"No—yes," said Tubby.

"That's why we can see the moon—the light brings us the image. All light carries an image of something—that's why we can see things."

"Now when light leaves the earth and goes out into space it takes with it an image of the earth and everything that is happening on the earth."

"Right," said Tubby. "Go on."

"Now some of this light may have to travel a hundred years before it reaches a star. When it does it mixes with other light and is reflected back in another hundred years to us. But—mark you this—but it still carries the image of the earth and what happened on the earth when it was here."

"But you don't see *that*," said Tubby. "We see the star. Ain't I right?"

"Yes," said the professor. "Of course you're right. And the reason we see the star is because that image is the last one the light got. That is predominate. All the others are there—but they are hidden away beneath the star image."

"Oh," said Tubby.

"Nobody ever knew they were there, and so of course nobody ever tried to get them out. But *I* knew they were there—that's the *Oats Theory of the Rationality of Light*. And I have got them out!" His voice rose in triumph. "That's the Light Machine—the greatest invention in the history of the world!"

"Oh, the Light Machine," said Tubby, when the professor paused.

"The Oats Light Machine—here it is—the only one in the world. I'll show you at once."

He switched off the lights. The room was quite dark except for a little beam of white light that seemed to thread its way through the intricate system of mirrors and prisms of the Light Machine. Tubby could not see where this light came from or where it went to. But he saw distinctly that it turned several corners and was alternately broad and narrow. It was white throughout most of its course; but in one short span it was a dark, angry red, and in another a deep, beautiful purple.

"The Light Machine," the Professor began; his fingers caressed one of its little reflectors lovingly, "is able to extract from light all the images it holds, no matter how long they have been there."

"That's wonderful, ain't it?" said Tubby with admiration.

"Yes. Let me show you. Here is the telescope. I train it on a star—a star, mark you, that is not a sun, but that shines

by reflected light. This beam of starlight, contains moonlight, earthlight, sunlight (*our* sunlight, you know)—and the light from millions of other suns. The starlight comes out from here"—he touched the lower end of the telescope.

"Now you see this ray of my own created light passes directly in front of where the starlight comes out—that's where they mix."

Tubby saw the little beam of white light crossed at right angles to the telescope eyepiece and passed very close to it.

"This light of my own is created by burning zonogen—a gas I discovered myself."

"From this point, where the starlight joins it, my ray goes to the spectroscope"—he touched another portion of the Light Machine—"and it is polarized here. These"—he indicated a long row of tiny black compartments; Tubby could see the beam of light entering at one end and emerging at the other—"these are my image extractors. Each takes from the light some of its images—leaving finally only the earthlight and the images that belong to it."

"There are many other processes—*some* day you will understand them all. But for now—let me show you the result."

"The pure earthlight passes last of all into my projector. See it here?" He laid his hand on what looked to Tubby something like a magic lantern.

"My operating power is electricity." He turned a switch. Tubby first heard a low hum and then a whirring, clicking sound.

"This projector magnifies the image—throws it up on a screen." He pointed to the wall; Tubby saw a small square of canvas hung on the wall.

"Now then," the professor continued, his voice trembling with emotion, "that star my telescope is pointing at is now exactly nine hundred and twenty-seven and one half Light-years away. That means that eighteen hundred and fifty-five years ago to-night the light we are getting back now from that star left the earth. Do you know what was happening eighteen hundred and fifty-five years ago to-night."

"No," said Tubby. "Yes. Lots of things."

"I can pick anything I want from the light," the professor answered. "I merely tune my instruments differently. Like wireless, you know—it's all a matter of vibration. I have picked the most important thing that was happening—the 'Burning of Rome'!"

He turned another switch; the clicking sound grew louder. On the sheet, Tubby saw a great city in flames. He seemed to be standing on a hill, looking down at it. In the foreground he saw the young Roman Emperor, with his mistress, his friends and his music, as they reclined at ease, watching the destruction. Tubby stared for a long time, fascinated.

"You are looking into the past," he heard the professor's droning voice saying. "All that has been stored up in the light all these years. It is light itself—the work of God, not of man."

"That is Nero sitting there. No one living to-day on this earth has ever seen him before. But there he is—Nero the Cruel, Emperor of Rome. We see him, you and I, for we are looking into the past—looking into the past." The professor's voice trailed off into silence.

Tubby stared breathlessly. His heart was beating fast; he was trembling all over. He felt suddenly a little faint. He was in a cold sweat, and he sat down abruptly in a little wooden chair beside the Light Machine.

The scene before him was very vivid; he could almost hear the Emperor's music. Why, he *did* hear music! Funny! The professor had not mentioned that.

The clicking noise grew louder; the scene before him was so bright he could see nothing else around. It was very dark, and very close and stuffy. Where was the professor? Why didn't he say something about the music?

Tubby grew a little frightened. He shifted his feet uneasily. The little chair in which he was sitting was very uncomfortable. It cramped him; his back hurt. After a little while the scene before him slowly faded. The lights in the room flashed on; a rustling, and a shuffling of many feet sounded in his ears.

Tubby sat up abruptly, blinking in the sudden light.

"Some kid, that Nero—eh, Jake?" said a voice beside him.

"You said it. Some picture. Come on, Tubby, let's go home," said the first man.

A YEAR AGO

BY ETHELWYN POMEROY

A YEAR ago, just such a night as this,
 With white stars dreaming in the summer sky,
 You bent above me tenderly, and I
 Lifted my face to your first eager kiss;
 We knew the flaming splendor of love's bliss
 While eons and eternities swept by
 Swift as the passing of a little sigh—
 A year ago—just such a night as this.

We did not dream that we should be so wise—
 We did not know that love which was so sweet
 Could faint and die, and fade to dull regret—
 And yet to-night, with cold, indifferent eyes,
 We passed each other swiftly on the street;
 Did you remember, too? Did you forget?

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



IT is sometimes said that the sequel to a good story is usually a disappointment. We don't agree with this theory. We could name a dozen good stories with equally good sequels. Certainly it does not apply to the new five-part serial that starts in next week's issue of ALL-STORY WEEKLY:

LAND OF THE SHADOW PEOPLE

(A Sequel to "A Man Named Jones")

BY CHARLES B. STILSON

Author of "The Little Crooked Master," "Polaris of the Snows," "Minos of Sardanes," etc.

We have published few stories that have met with so hearty and enthusiastic a reception as that accorded "A Man Named Jones" by our readers. And the sequel is every bit as good as the earlier yarn. It concerns the hunt for an emerald mine in Peru, and adventures with a tribe of remarkable people who change—but no! we'll leave the story for the author. We can say, though, that you will meet some old friends besides Jones and Katherine—among them the Martian, Nambu, and that smiling villain, Grimshaw. And if there's a slow or uninteresting page in the whole yarn we haven't been able to find it!



THE cartoonists have cast several men for that most ungrateful of rôles, "the man who is always taking the joy out of life." Personally, we would like to propose the scientist for the part because he is the man who resolves our emotions into physical reactions and our most cherished ambitions into Freudian complexes. In spite of Freud and science, we still believe a man is captain of his soul and sails his own bark. Perhaps this is the reason we want you to like next week's novelette—

THE CONVERT GOES NORTH

BY VALGARD DENGIR

as much as we like it. In any case, here is a capital story of the early settlement days in the Middle West, when men were hard sinners and their vices apparently made for inevitable tragedy. This particular convert— But we are not going to take the joy out of this story. It is here, and here in abundance, for all who come to it with an open mind. Valgard Dengir is an author who will bear watching.



"THE PRICE OF ADMIRALTY," the sixth of C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne's "TEACH: PIRATE DE LUXE,"

series, deals with the affairs—yes, plural, *affairs*—of the heart of Mr. William Pickles, Captain Teach's bold gunner officer; also with the further adventures of the descendant of Blackbeard. Next week's story is right up to the high standard of the series.



A STORY by E. K. Means is a treat for his old friends, and a revelation to his new readers. In next week's issue of ALL-STORY WEEKLY you will find "PRIZE MONEY," a tale of the lively happening that befell when a circus visited a Southern town. Be sure not to miss it.



HERMAN HOWARD MATTESON has another fine story of the Puget Sound people in next week's issue—"MOOSUM IN PERIGEE." It's a typical Matteson yarn—excellent plot, lively action, strong, real characters, realistic color.



ANOTHER "TEN-FOOT CHAIN" LETTER
TO THE EDITOR:

I have just finished reading "The Ten-Foot Chain," by Max Brand, E. K. Means, P. P. Sheehan, and Achmed Abdullah, and they are all fine stories. Only I do not agree with P. P.

Sheehan, and E. K. Means, that love is mere passion only. I think that love, true love, that is based on these three planes, mental, spiritual and physical, can survive all tests, even the too-close physical contact of daily life. Where two people, who love, are in perfect harmony with each other, mentally, physically, and spiritually, there is a tender comradeship and perfect understanding which can withstand all tests, even the ten-foot chain. I think that love is a divine spark of the unquenchable fire that is in God. Love is something more than mere passion, implanted in the breast of man to preserve the continuity of the race. True love, broadly speaking, humanizes and uplifts man, and draws him nearer to God. Love makes men more kindly affectioned toward one another and checks in a measure, although not wholly, the natural evil in man. Love is man's spiritual being—the link between God and man. Is mother-love mere passion? If not, neither is lover's love, for all love is linked together. But some one will say, we are not talking of mother-love, which is very different from love between man and woman. Yes, it is different, but sunlight when it is divided into separate parts produces different colors—red, violet, blue, *et cetera*. The colors are all different from each other, nevertheless are they not all of the same sunlight? So it is with love, which is divided into different kinds: mother love, love between man and woman, brotherly love, *et cetera*, but after all, the fundamental principle of all love is the same.

Give us some sequels to the following: "Th' Rambin' Kid," "The Gold Girl," "The Untamed," "The Moon Pool," "Mr. Shen of Shensi." All the stories in your magazine are one hundred per cent perfect. Guess I'll close, as this letter is too long already. It would be interesting to read other readers' opinions of "The Ten-Foot Chain" in the Heart to Heart Talks. P. A. COOPER.

Horseheads, New York.

FROM A REAL DAUGHTER OF THE WEST

TO THE EDITOR:

I have long been an interested reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and while not a subscriber I have seldom missed buying it every week, since it was first published as a weekly magazine. I can truthfully say that it has helped to pass away many evenings out here on the ranch which otherwise would have seemed very lonesome. During the strike we missed it very much.

In Heart to Heart Talks in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY of April 3 I read a letter from Edwin Irvine Haines, Broad Street, New York City, in regard to the West and Western stories. While I agree with him that Western stories, as a rule, describe the old life of the West rather than the present time, I think Mr. Haines's own knowledge of the West could be improved upon. In criticizing the story, "Th' Rambin' Rid," by Earl W. Bowman, he says, "The author speaks of automobiles and garages and cowboys wearing chaps

almost in the same paragraph." Well, why not? It only goes to show that Mr. Bowman knows what he is writing about.

On nearly every Western ranch to-day one can see at least one automobile, often two or three, as well as trucks and tractors. But neither the Western rancher nor the cowboy goes to town dressed in velveteens with cavalry puttees, but in modern business suits, differing very little from those worn in the frenzied financial district of Broad Street, New York City.

However, nearly every Western rancher or cattleman wears chaps when riding after stock. He wears chaps, not in imitation of some "movie hero," but for comfort and protection to his clothing. If the gentleman from New York could take part in one of the fall round-ups, when the cattle are driven from their summer range in the mountains to the home ranches in the valley, when the cow-punchers are riding from daylight until dark, through timber and brush, often all day in the rain, he would appreciate the comfort of a good pair of chaps. He would understand that chaps, spurs, high-horned saddles and "lass ropes" all have their places in the busy life of the Western stockman, and are kept, not for show, but for service. And for that same reason most every cowboy carries a forty-five or modern automatic. Not to shoot up the town, but to shoot coyotes, badgers or other animals that infest the range. As for rifles, they are taken on hunting trips, of course, but are a mighty awkward article to carry when riding a fractious bronco.

My home is on the old ranch that my grandfather took up in 1859, so I think I am entitled to call myself a native daughter of the Northwest.

Walla Walla, Washington.

Miss D.

ONLY KICK—"SELLS TOO FAST"

TO THE EDITOR:

There is only one objection I have to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and that is, it sells too fast. In this little railroad town they stand around and wait for it on the day it arrives, so you can see what chance I have of getting mine regularly, with three little children to take care of and rarely ever time to leave the house. I have to wait until my husband gets home in the evening, and by the time he gets over to town the magazines are all taken.

I used to read nearly all the current magazines, but now I have abandoned nearly all in favor of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and after the kiddies are tucked in for the night I devour it. Indeed, the clean stories you print are a relief these days. I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY now for close on to six years, week in and week out.

I first started reading it while on a visit to my mother in Albany, Oregon, and I became interested in a wonderful story which, I think, was entitled, "Under the Andes." She had a great stack of ALL-STORIES and *Cavaliers*. After that I was an ALL-STORY fan. I always read the Heart

to Heart Talks, and it is interesting to learn the various opinions of ALL-STORY WEEKLY readers. Some like one thing and some like another. For myself, I hardly ever miss a story, if I have time to read it.

I note what Edwin I. Haines said in regard to cowboys—he did not think "Th' Ramblin' Kid" ran true to form. Well, Mr. Haines may be familiar with some ranches where the cowboys wear velveteens, corduroys and calvary puttees, but I wonder if he was ever out with a round-up. I know of a good many ranches throughout the Southwest, and I am a native of Arizona, where the cowboys still stick to chaps, high-heeled boots, *et cetera*. Of course the days of indiscriminate killings are over, and the cowboy of to-day is not so free with the festive forty-five.

Like many others, we would like a sequel to "The Moon Pool." It was a wonderfully written story.

MRS. HENRY HAYES SMITH.
Barstow, California.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

I do not know if I have ever read a magazine that I like better than the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I have been a constant reader for the past four years, and in that time I have only missed one issue and the reason for that was they were sold out before I could get one, so to avoid the failure of missing any more I am sending a year's subscription.

I like nearly all the stories that are in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Once in a while there is one that does not appeal to me, but I always read every story in it, as a friend of mine says, from "kiver to kiver." I always take my books to him to read, as he is crippled and is not able to get out after the books, and he enjoys them immensely. I would like to see a sequel to the "Moon Pool," and "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," as they were great; also a sequel to "Untamed," and "A Man Named Jones," and "Misery Mansions."

I think Max Brand's stories are fine. I would also like to see some more of the *Semi Dual* stories. With best wishes to ALL-STORY WEEKLY,

Rock Island, Illinois. EARL R. KNISEL.

We have long been readers of this magazine, but always bought it of the news-stands. Since moving to the country we go in town so irregularly that the news-stands are often sold out, and we lose out on some of our stories. We like most all the stories except the so-called "different" stories. It would take up too much time and space to tell all the ones we like, or our favorite authors. Anyway, we shouldn't like to miss any of them.

Elba, Arkansas. MRS. WINNIE OGLESBY.

I just finished reading "The Ten-Foot Chain," and want to express my opinion of it. It is good and all four stories could easily apply to the four different cases. It is just this: real love,

with no chance for doubt, could not be hurt, but if doubt enters, the chances are very good for a rupture. You will find that faith is the basis of all four of the stories. Faith is the mother of love, of hope, and of honor. Doubt is the father of fear, and fear is the little devil that causes so much sorrow in this old world, for once you doubt you begin to fear, and when fear comes hate slips in. So, to get back to the point, the success of love depends on one thing—faith! That is my opinion, and I believe that all four of the boys are right in their own way.

Omaha, Nebraska.

H. F. JONES.

In ALL-STORY WEEKLY of April 3 Mr. Edwin Irvin Haines makes the statement that cowboys of to-day do not wear chaps. He says, "If a cowboy wore chaps on one of the ranches of to-day, he would be hooted out of town on the spot." Mr. Haines gives his address Broad Street, New York. Now we live in sunny southern California, and are personally acquainted with a cowboy that not only does wear chaps and gun, but makes his own chaps, tans the hide and makes the chaps, fringes and all, and wears them to town when he rides, but leaves them at home when he drives into town in his car. If Mr. Haines would ride the hills with our cowboy friend, he would see the reason for both chaps and gun. If he did not wear the chaps his pants would be torn by the brush, through which he must go on his daily rounds, and his gun is needed for coyotes. We have been readers of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY magazine a good many years. MRS. S. F. DAVIS.

Chico, California.

In one of your recent issues a man from the East attempts to inform the readers about the West. He says, among other things, that a cow-puncher who wore chaps would be hooted out of town. Say, if he ever saw a cow-puncher that wore putts he has seen something I never saw, and I have seen many of them. Also about the chaps. I wear them, as does every sensible rider who has any respect for his comfort or health, and I've never been hooted out of town, either. Imagine, if you can, riding fifty-five or sixty miles in a day, sometimes in a drenching rain, with no protection for your legs. It doesn't set well with a Westerner, born and raised West of the Rockies, to hear an Easterner attempt to set the readers right about Western apparel; also, while .45's are not as universally in evidence as formerly, yet they have not all disappeared.

Hansen, Idaho

RAYMOND D. BUTLER.

Please send me March 20, 1920, issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for the enclosed ten cents in stamps. I hope you have this number in stock, as it contains the first instalment of "Tarzan and the Valley of Luna," which I missed. Give us more stories by E. K. Means, Max Brand, Captain Dingle, James B. Hendryx, and E. J. Rath. I like most of the novelettes and short stories in the

ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Among the continued stories I was greatly interested in "No Fear," "Th' Ramblin' Kid," "The Gold Girl," "Raspberry Jam," and "The Little Crooked Master." I always read the Heart to Heart Talks first. Why not add a page or two to it? I am sure the majority of readers would approve. THEODORE TAETSCH.

Westville, Connecticut.

I am enclosing four dollars for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for one year, as I can't depend on the news-stands any more. Please start my subscription with the March 6 number, as I wouldn't miss the end of "Th' Ramblin' Kid" for a whole lot. I have been reading the magazine for years: as the *All-Story Magazine*, when it was a monthly; the *Cavalier Weekly*, and right on until now, and, in my opinion, it can't be beat.

I haven't a single kick. Stories like "Th' Ramblin' Kid," "A Buccaneer in Spats," "The Gold Girl" (surely we get a sequel to that), "Comrades of Peril," and others of like nature are my favorites; but I wouldn't want them all alike. I read the ALL-STORY WEEKLY from cover to cover. My husband and a whole crowd of my friends do also, then we discuss the different stories. Wish we had a sequel to "The Texan," but here is wishing the ALL-STORY WEEKLY to continue just as good as it is, during my lifetime. Please send the March 6 number soon.

Dunedin, Florida.

VIOLA M. SANDERS.

I have been reading your magazine among many others for years, and am forced into my first offense by the letter of E. H. W. in your issue of April 10. He—or is it she?—sounds like a sophomore. I have, for my sins, been one myself, and feel I can recognize the species. Not like the "different" stories! Then one must not enjoy reading Poe, or Haggard, or Doyle, or Dumas, or Dante, or Shakespeare.

Permit me to congratulate you on the biggest find in pure literature which has been made in the past five years: Jeremy Lane. "The Fragrant Web" was a jewel, and "Oblivion" promises well. Many of your shorts are, of course, trivial, but most of the continued stories are worth while. Taken by and large, I know of few publications so uniformly good. Long life and good luck.

St. Louis, Missouri.

HENRY L. KING.

I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY about three years, and I must say it's about the best ever. A few of the stories that I liked best were: "The Gold Girl," "The People of the Golden Atom," "Raspberry Jam," "The House with a Bad Name," "The Unlatched Door," "The Conquest of the Moon Pool." I like the continued stories and novelettes—they are longer. "The Thunder of Doom," by Katherine and Robert Pinkerton, was the best story that was ever written. I think that the whole word ought to get together and give three rousing cheers for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

THELMA MYERS.

Ranger, Texas.

I have been a reader of your magazine ever since I was ten years old, or rather it was the *Cavalier* then. I sure enjoy it fine. My mother and myself could not do without it. I did not like "Ashes to Ashes." I do like everything else in your magazine, though, so I haven't got any right to kick, as I see lots of others did. Won't you give us a good story of the East? I also like your Western stories. I think "Th' Ramblin' Kid" is just fine. But don't we get a sequel to that? It is a shame to leave *Carolyn June* and the *Gold Dust Maverick* waiting for *Captain Jack* to come back with his master. Send the magazine as soon as possible, as I want to hear how the stories end up.

MISS OTTIE GRANTHAM.

76 Reed Street, Waycross, Georgia.

THIS IS THE **118th** ALL-STORY WEEKLY SERIAL TO BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM

LADYFINGERS

BY JACKSON GREGORY

Author of "Wolf Breed," "The Short Cut," "The Joyous Trouble Maker," "Six Feet Four," etc.

To the large circle of readers who know and appreciate Mr. Gregory's justly popular work this story will come as a surprise—but certainly not an unpleasant one. It is out of his usual line, at least in so far as setting is concerned, but the reader soon realizes that it is still a Jackson Gregory story—Gregory transplanted. Having become accustomed to the northwest winds blowing through this very capable author's very competent stories of Athahasca or thereabouts, the story of *Robert Ashe*, beginning as it does with the savor of San Francisco's slums and gangsters and crooked policemen hanging over it, will seem a somewhat startling departure, but *Bobby Ashe—Ladyfingers*, so-called—doesn't let it remain so very long. He soon leads the way out into the sunlight and the open spaces; out among real "humans." *Ladyfingers* is a wonderful character in a remarkable story, and though he has done many fine things of a different type, Mr. Gregory has never done anything better. (ALL-STORY WEEKLY, April 21 to May 26, 1917.)

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